

ISLAM IN EUROPE – A DIALOGUE BETWEEN CULTURES

Study Session at the European Youth Centre

Strasbourg, 8th – 14th of December 2003

– Participants’ Report –

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Monday the 8th of December

A nice and relaxed welcome evening was enjoyed by the team and participants in the Austrian room. The evening was a chance to get to know everybody and their names, and to serve this purpose, a few games were played.

Tuesday the 9th of December

Introduction

Description of the activity

After breakfast all participants gathered in the Austrian Room and were introduced to the YFU wake-up call. It was a great energizer for participants before they were formally introduced to each other and the hosts of the study session (EEE-YFU, FEMYSO and Council of Europe).

Following the introduction of participants, each individual was asked to take a couple of minutes to reflect on his/her expectations of: themselves, the group, the seminar overall and the seminar's outcome. They were also asked to give suggestions and pieces of advice to the International Organising Team (IOT).

This information was collected on flip charts and presented to the group. The collaborated information shed to light some reoccurring issues. - For example under expectations "for themselves", many participants stated that one of their objectives was *to listen, to be open minded, be constructive, get to know other participants and learn about their religious backgrounds.*

Expectations for the seminar overall included learn more about other cultures and the situation of (religious) minorities. Have constructive, intense and fun working sessions and participate in discussions about religion (Islam, Christianity and perhaps other religions) and the immediate consequences for believers in their communities.

The overall consensus for the group was that all participants should be tolerant and respectful of each others' opinion and beliefs, and all be given a fair chance to express their views.

Expectations towards the outcome of the Study Session included maintaining and continuing the process of intercultural dialogue and developing individual knowledge of Islam and other religions. Many participants expressed their wish to stay in touch after the Study Session and to spread and transfer the knowledge in their home countries.

After the short coffee break and energizing session we moved to the conference room where a presentation of the host organizations took place. Most participants found the presentation very informative and interesting.

Prelude

Challenging stereotypes

Description of the activity

One of the activities that stood out to many participants was the one organized by Mohammed and Sunduss (FEMYSO representatives). The task involved participants identifying themselves with people from different social backgrounds and identities.

Following this activity in small discussion groups many participants commented on some of the social stereotypes they found existed.

Group building

Description of the activity

Later in the day's event, various group-building activities took place. Participants were divided into small groups that were given a brain teaser, problem-solving task. The task confirmed basic principles involved in team work, such as listening and respecting each other and being open to exchange of information.

Video "Planet Islam" (Islam in France)

On Tuesday evening it was optional to watch the video, dealing with the situation of the Muslim community in France.

The first thing that should be said is that there are 5 million Muslims living in France today. Most of them are immigrants or second generation immigrants whose parents lived and worked hard for France for more than 50 years (at a time when France needed labours). Mostly they came from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. Nowadays there is a problem that some French treat Muslims in a very bad way. Interviewed Muslims say that everybody has the human rights except them. They are also French - and Muslims - and want to live like others. They want to have their rights respected by police and government, and the French society in general.

Of course, such a situation has its deep roots. It started as long ago Algeria fight for independence in 1954. This video was made after the bombings in 1995 and 1996 for which immigrant terrorists were responsible. It also tried to highlight the history and motivations of the people planting bombs, which led down to colonialism and the French support of a military regime in Algeria, but also living conditions of minority groups in France and lack of acceptance by the majority of society.

After such events, people are afraid of Muslims and immigrants as a whole. They think that a Muslim girl student can keep a bomb in her bag. Furthermore, also the government is harsher than before. It was made clear that the reaction of fear and intolerance by the French society only provoked more and more radical views on the side of minority groups, because they did not feel they have a chance or integrate and be accepted, even if they wanted to.

Another topic the video deals with is the wearing of headscarves by young Muslim women in schools. The case of two girls was presented, who had been expelled from school, because they started to wear headscarf. It was not acceptable for the teachers to have these girls in their classes, since they saw the headscarf as a provocation of the French culture and also as a symbol of the oppression of women. For the Muslim girls it is one of the main principles of their religion to cover the body from the looks of foreign men. The

court interfered and decided the school should accept the girls back into the classrooms. But school administration expelled them once again and now they are waiting for another court decision. It is a general view in France that Muslims should respect the secular principle of division of state (school) and religion and therefore take off the veil at school.

The video discusses the question of integration of Islam into French culture, but Muslims wonder what it exactly means? – To eat pork and to drink wine? Muslims simply want to live and work as other people but without breaking the religious principles, it's very important for their present life and hereafter.

So, by the end, the video was quite thought provoking and therefore a group of participants had a discussion on it afterwards for one hour. For example, it was interesting to know through discussion that when it was an attempt of attack in mosque during the last Ramadan, neither TV and radio nor printed Mass Media wrote about this except 2 lines in the newspaper French Agency. So, neither Mass Media nor government talks about the present Islamophobia in the French society.

Wednesday the 10th of December

Exhibition

Description of the activity

Each participant was asked beforehand to do some research on intercommunity relations involving a (the) Muslim community in their local area (country) as preparation for the Study Session. In the European Youth Centre their outcome was presented in an exhibition. Everybody had the chance to get an impression of the situation in other countries. Additionally, participants were given the chance to present their research in a small group of five to six people and questions could be asked in order to get an in-depth view. During the following break, knowledge gained in the different presentation groups was exchanged.

Participants responses

It became obvious that the relations between Muslim communities and the European society they live in depend very much on the size of that community. For instance in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania there are only very small Muslim communities although more and more Muslims have come to study and work in Eastern Europe during the last 10 years. These small communities are not very present in public and therefore the citizens know nothing about their existence.

In other countries the Muslim community is very present in politics and media as well as in everyday life. In metropolis such as London, where there is a relatively large Muslim community, a wide dialogue is already going on. In Belgium, the *Islamic Federation in Belgium* has created a well working Muslim network that is actively giving input to the society and therefore promoting a very positive picture to the Belgians.

An effective way of dialogue is e.g. the "open doors of the mosques". - The rising number of visitors each year is a sign of a thoughtful and sincere interest and respect towards Islam.

Often Islamic traditions and laws in the European countries are contradictive, thus compromises must be made on both sides. Switzerland for example shows one compromise that can be made. There - as well as throughout the EU - slaughtering animals according to Muslim rules (halal) is legally not allowed, but it is allowed to import such meat.

Other practical difficulties arise in several countries regarding the Islamic tradition and requirements of burring the dead. According to Islam, it is not allowed to reuse graves as it is done for in many European countries. Therefore, it is an important issue to provide enough space for graveyards.

Signs in society have to be set as well. In Germany, for instance, an Islamic Charta exists stating that the Islamic community accepts the principle of democracy and the order of law. Even though this is an important approach of the Muslim community and the state, the problem is that many immigrants do not know their rights and how they can participate and contribute to society.

Outcome

Participants realised that the diverse problems arising in various countries are quite similar. It became clear that the dialogue between communities needs to be improved

and therefore the competence of having such a dialogue needs to be improved on both sides – Muslim and non-Muslim – in order to fulfil the growing demand and interest in Islam. The personal approach needs to be emphasised – in particular due to the present political situation in the world and the stereotypes created in media. It is important to learn from communication models within the EU and to adapt them into our societies.

Intercultural dialog - case studies

Description of the activity

In the afternoon session there were three case studies to be analysed. Participants divided themselves into three groups; each group had a case to discuss on four different levels. The main objective was to come to a solution, which would be suitable for a modern and tolerant society.

Case Study 1 - Job Traineeship

A European Exchange Youth Organisation based in central Terasa, Eastern Europe, by the name of JAWA is seeking a young trainee for a term of one year. The work will include assisting the Director and attending international meetings plus occasionally representing the Director in his absence.

A range of application forms have been reviewed from which a short list of six potential applicants was selected for interviews. Amongst those two were from Eastern Europe, one from Scandinavia and three from southern Europe. The best candidates are two females one from Scandinavia and one from Eastern Europe. Both women have experience in working in national youth organisations and have the necessary abilities required for the job. Both are equally appropriate for the job. The young woman from Eastern Europe is based in the northern parts of Terasa and is a Muslim practicing the hijab and the fundamentals of the Islamic faith. The Scandinavian young woman is atheist. Both speak English and French, which are the working languages, used in the organisation.

The job will entitle travelling abroad monthly sometimes with the company of the committee and at others alone. It will also involve residing in the centre of the organisation.

- How do you address the necessary requirements?
- What strategies would you pursue in the given situation?
- What are the issues arising?
- What different interests need to be considered?
- Who would you adopt and why?

Participants' response

The first group did not come up with a definite solution as they found the case too general to make the choice between two candidates. The idea that came first to their minds was that the personality of the candidates is what matters the most. Having had the interviews, the executive committee could be able to decide which candidate suits the best (but the group faced the fact that they could not practically do so in a case study). They group discussed all four questions on different levels and tried to imagine what backgrounds could be faced. There were many different interpretations of the case, so after long discussions the group decided that one definite solution was not to be achieved without adding more information.

Outcome

Firstly, the group defined all necessary requirements that would be addressed to that position. - They came up with the following requirements:

1. Assisting the director
2. Communication skills
3. Work experience
4. International experience
5. Organisational skills
6. English and French language skills
7. Representative skills
8. Ability to travel (flexibility)
9. Residing in the centre of the organisation

All these seemed very important but the focus was on *religion*. Many issues arising were considered to be different for the Muslim and the atheist candidate but in the end, they would come up to the same conclusion, namely that everything depends on personality. The judicial fact that nobody can be rejected from getting a job because of his/her religion was brought into the debate as well. Coming to the end of the discussion, the participants decided to define the things that need to be considered in order to make a decision. - They decided that these would be the main considerations to be made:

- The background of the organisation
- The religious background of the other employees
- Knowledge of Terasa
- Gender of the Director
- Visa, costs, availability, restrictions
- Ethical, social, moral and religious beliefs
- (i.e. handshaking, food, alcohol, tolerance, prayer, flexibility both of the candidate and the organisation)
- Employment laws of Terasa
- Residing in the centre of the organisation/facilities
- PERSONALITY

Once again the main importance was emphasized on *personality*. Nationality or religion of the candidate could make a difference only under certain circumstances.

Case Study 2 - Marriage

1) A young European exchange student wants to marry a young Muslim girl that he met on his exchange in a predominantly Muslim country. Her family is devout in their Islam and she practices the hijab. They are both business students aged nineteen and from close-net supportive family backgrounds.

- What are the issues arising?
- What different interests need to be considered?
- What is the role of the exchange organisation in this process pre, during and after the exchange?
- What strategies would you pursue in the given situation?

2) Correspondence continues by email, phone and occasional visits. The young Muslim girl later discovers that she is three months pregnant. His parents are very conservative and have strong traditional values.

Participants' response

The second group had a case study of two parts. Firstly it was discussed on the broader perspective. The group stated that it is important to get approval from the Muslim family because a non-Muslim man most likely has to convert to Islam if getting married to a Muslim girl due to the fact that Muslim children are raised according to the religion of the

father. It is recommended that a person who accepts Islam and marries a Muslim has been practising monotheistic religion before. If both already are Muslims, such issues will of course not arise. Furthermore, the non-Muslim side might face an age problem. Different society, tradition and language problems between families can cause problems that would be considered in other circumstances.

Outcome

Slightly shocked, the participants emphasized during the brainstorming the importance of the Islamic country as their traditions and attitudes differ from country to country and have to be taken into consideration. That both cannot be together without getting married led the participants wonder about the arising issues

- Religion is a big issue and since she is strictly religious he is
 - a Muslim
 - he converts, whereas his background being a believing Christian or Jew is preferred to atheism
- Age could be a problem for the European family, assuming it is a Western European family--> they are only 19
- The families might not accept the partner for their religious and/ or cultural background (despite his conversion)
- The children's religion and linked habits are of importance since a marriage is a step to build a family
- Communication problems between the families
- Purpose of the marriage --> Visa for Europe?

Participants' response

Suddenly the situation changed: The girl was pregnant and the background of the boy was more concrete: his parents were conservative. After getting some more information it was decided that in that case marriage is only solution for the Muslim and also probably for a conservative European family. The non-Muslim side (a guy on this case) has to convert due to the fact that marriage is sealed at the presents of GOD. Looking at the abortion it's not an option after 40 days of pregnancy. The group had to take into the consideration what are the traditions in the Muslim girls' domestic country to analyse the case deeper.

Outcome

So things changed, coming down to only 4 possibilities:

1. They have to get married in front of God in order to keep her family's acceptance-taking into consideration the religious issue
2. In some countries (e.g. Bosnia, Georgia) it is enough to get married- then he needn't convert and religion is only a matter of how to raise kids
3. In case he does not love her anymore, he needn't get married, she will bring up the baby and her family will support the baby as well.
4. It was perceived as rather difficult to solve that complex case, taking all aspects into consideration. A lot of questions came up that were discussed outside the assigned discussion time.

Case Study 3 - Marriage

A young European exchange student wants to marry a young Muslim male student that she met on her exchange in a European country. His family are devout in their Islam and he follows the fundamentals of the faith. She is a business students aged nineteen and from a close-net supportive family backgrounds. He is lives on the suburbs of a major city and is a street-wise young man. He wants a long-term relationship and does not want to get committed yet.

- What are the issues arising?
- What different interests need to be considered?
- What is the role of the exchange organisation in this process pre, during and after the exchange?
- What strategies would you pursue in the given situation?

Correspondence continues by email, phone and occasional visits. The exchange student discovers that the young Muslim male is being forced into a marriage with his cousin.

At the first part of the case the group had got a ground for the conflict. They were imagining all possible situations. They analysed each situation. The case was quite broad and nothing special was said, they could not predict the situation, though there were some main points that were discussed by the group.

- What an exchange student is allowed to do during her exchange year?
- How faithful was a Muslim student to Islam?
- What does the long-term relationship mean?
- How families and relatives will react?
- What do the exchange organizations have to do?

Participants response

Participants put possible events on the paper, but in the second part of the case when the group was given additional information; the exchange student discovered that the young Muslim male was forced into a marriage with his cousin. New points of view were discussed as the case was narrowed.

In conclusion the group provided answers to the main questions.

1. Arising issues
 - Emotional difficulties of the exchange
 - Cultural differences
 - Problems in relationship on the basis of religion.
2. The exchange student is allowed to everything except the things that are restricted by the rules of the exchange organization.
3. The exchange organization has to provide any kind of support, even after the exchange year and it has to combat prejudice.

Thursday 11th of December

Confrontation game

This exciting energiser definitely woke up all of us and turned out to be quite inspirational for the discussion groups afterwards.

Description of activity

A statement was read aloud and shown to the group. All participants had to choose a side; standing in one end of the room meant "YES" and standing in the other end meant "NO": voting neutral was not an option. An individual was allowed to walk over to the other end of the room, if persuaded by the arguments used on the other side.

The dilemma game started off with the statement: "Eggs come before chickens". This was a "warming up"-statement, the discussions and arguments became stronger and more intense as the statements were more related to the topic of the Study Session: Islam in Europe. The further statements were:

- The state should be religiously neutral
- Religious symbols should be forbidden in public places
- European culture is based on Christianity
- European culture is based on Islam

The idea behind this exercise was to get a better insight and understanding of why people take a particular position in these discussion-evoking matters, and to provoke

Participants' response

Some were persuaded, some stuck to their original choice. Still, there was a general feeling of confusion and frustration because you had to pick a side. The general overall impression was that people really made an effort into imagining themselves in the opinion of the other side, so in that way it was a very successful and useful exercise. Concluding, it can be said this form of the morning session fulfilled its purpose can be used in other cases as well, as it proved to be an effective technique to enhance dialogue and mutual understanding.

Outcome

The participants never all at once were on the same side of the room, so there was always reason for debate. The way a statement was read and interpreted often came into the discussion. The statement "European culture is based on Christianity" could be interpreted for example as "European culture is based on Christianity exclusively" or as "European culture is based on Christianity as well as other religions".

Discussion groups

Description of the activity

Inspired by the dilemma game we moved on to the second part of the morning session. Introduced were four flip charts with the following topics:

- Cultural integration
- Religious dialogue and awareness
- Community and social services
- Legal and finance issues

Any question related to one of these topics could be formulated and written down on a

post-it. Participants were free to choose one of the four discussion groups formed accordingly.

The activity was an effective way to cover many different topics. In small groups, the participants were able to discuss the issues in which they were interested and go deeper where necessary.

Cultural integration

Description of the activity

We discussed the definitions of culture and integration and listed keywords

Outcome

At the end of the workshop we found for both terms definitions that every one of us agreed with. It was very interesting to see these both terms from so many different perspectives.

Religious dialogue and awareness

Description of the activity

The participants critically discussed a variety of problems ranging from fundamental questions of how much culture is influenced by religion and why people are so afraid of religion to more current concerns of why there are so few democracies among countries where Islam is the main religion.

Participant's response

Everybody contributed actively to the discussion and it was interesting to hear opinions based on a different cultural and religious background. Especially the Muslim participants enhanced the discussion with their special knowledge to a great extent. It was a pity however, that the time to discuss those issues was too short and some participants criticised the necessary limitation of elaboration of the particular issues as well. A further exchange of ideas was continued during the rest of the day.

Outcome

The participants perceived the constructive discussion as very inspiring since every answer raised more questions and brought up new issues, which had to be considered. It was discussed that religion influenced culture and culture also influenced religion to a certain extent, and at the same time stressing the non- changeable core of religion. It was also stated, that religion has to be adoptable.

Again the lack of knowledge and awareness of Islam was criticized when the participants where wondering why people are so afraid of religion. The notion that religion is a very powerful paradigm people would give their lives for was discussed as well as the frequent abuse of religion as an excuse for political actions in past as well as present.

It was stressed that Islam is a way of life shown by God when it came to the issue of the lack of democracies in Islamic countries. It was mentioned that the example they set of the practice of Islam is not a good one. It was also argued that democracy was made by people and as an example it was pointed out that Christian countries used to be monarchies as well.

Community and social systems

Description of the activity

Six female participants joined this group in which many different questions were raised. Therefore the participants decided to discuss first the very abstract question of "what is a community and what dominates to build a community?".

The Islamic view of such practical issues as whether a woman can go to a male doctor or not, and whether Muslims are allowed to adopt or foster children, were brought to attention. In connection hereto, the group also discussed if community social services should receive governmental support or not.

The last issue raised was the relationship between the Koran, the environment and animals – and furthermore Halal slaughtering.

Outcome

The discussion was for all participants very deep, scientific and enlightening. On the most issues, there was a consensus to be found. The facilitator was helpful in providing the participants with insights of Islam. At the end, all agreed that the religion is really about peace and support and has nothing to do with the Islam we know from TV or newspaper.

LEGAL AND FINANCIAL ISSUES

Description of the activity

In this discussion group the following topics were discussed:

Islamic banking

In general it means that a Muslim cannot pay or receive interest. The question arose whether it is completely possible to incorporate Islamic banking in a global capitalist society. Conclusion: yes, it is almost impossible.

Marriage – polygamy

It is recommended for a Muslim man to marry only one wife. Marrying several is not recommended, but accepted. In the time of the prophet the wars made many women widowers. To secure the well-being of the women a man could marry up to four women, only on certain conditions. E.g. he has to treat all women equally. A woman can have a clause in her marital document stating her husband cannot marry another woman whilst married to her.

Islamic slaughtering

The topic was briefly discussed and a conclusion that none of the included really know enough about the subject. Several had heard scholars claiming that Islamic slaughtering is the most humane way of slaughtering.

Visit to the Mosque

Description of the activity

The participants met in Strasbourg and walked together to the Mosque. There a delicious meal and a "cultural evening" (with a variety of treats like homemade bread, sweets and pickles) was enjoyed. Later in the evening, the group went on a guided tour that ended outside the prayer room where the hosts showed the rituals performed before praying. In the prayer room, the group were introduced to the Muslim prayer and had the

opportunity to ask questions about the practise of Islam. A team member, Sunduss, helped out with the translation.

Participants response

Already before the visit to the Mosque some of the female participants had decided to wear the headscarf. They wanted to know how it is; understanding the look, how it affects your inner feelings and how you are perceived by others. Their comments were that they could empathize how Muslim feel wearing it. The reaction was positive, after a while they forgot that they were wearing it.

Outcome

The response was very positive as stated in the feedback session. The participants appreciated the opportunity to actually discover for themselves what they were talking about the last few days. The experience of the worship place was very intense since the participants were directly confronted with the religion. To meet the leaders of the Muslim community was very inspiring; the atmosphere enhanced the interreligious learning process at a very personal level.

Friday, December 12th

Round Table Discussion

The participants found themselves the whole day in the Plenary Room, because of having round table discussions with local community leaders and representatives and a MP from The Netherlands. The following persons gave a lecture:

- Aziz El Alouani: representative of the French Council of Muslim Faiths
- Zobida El Mekaoui: SOS Racism
- Hatice Sahin: Chair person of Women Organisation
- Mohamed Latahy: Imaam in Strasbourg
- Ove Ullestad: Leader of the Protestant Church in Strasbourg.

Keypoints of the lectures

Aziz El Alouani

In his view, the French Council of Muslim Faiths is not democratic, because its representatives are appointed by the state (Ministry of Interior). The ministry turned to embassies, e.g. the Saudi-Arabian (assumably due to mainly financial reasons) in order to appoint members to the Council. There should have been democratic elections, in which mosques should have been involved, yet the ministry had already decided on the members of the new Council.

El Alouani raised the question of the legitimacy of this body, especially since there was no imaam represented in the Council. Also, the representatives of the Council seem to be afraid to take a stand in certain issues, such as allowing Muslims to wear the Hijab at school: they were appointed by the Ministry of Interior and thus might be afraid of losing their position if their opinion contradicts that of the state.

In 2005 there will be new elections for the Council, which will hopefully be more democratic than the previous one.

Zobida El Mekaoui

According to the speaker, French Muslims face discrimination quite often and in various areas of their lives. Coming to the following conclusions, research was done by SOS Racism:

- Employment: If you are a Muslim, it is two or three times more likely to be unemployed.
- Housing: Families from Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) are denied housing, because of their ethnic origin.
- Education: Children are denied at kindergartens, because their parents do not have residence permits.
- Leisure: Muslims are refused access to disco's.

Hatice Sahin

She spoke about the empowerment of Turkish Muslim women in France. The Turkish community settled down in the 1960's. The empowerment process started when Muslim women began to have courses on French and to have small jobs, after their children had grown up and left home. From the 1990's on, Muslim women started to visit the Mosque.

The most empowering thing that Muslim women did, was that they reverted to the Islamic sources – the Quran and Sunnah – themselves. These were always interpreted

and explained by men. Now the most important task is to teach Muslim women about Islam and what it says about their rights: to make them aware of their freedom.

Mohamed Latahy

He stated that inter-religious dialogue is very important, especially after 9/11. Ever since then Muslims have been feeling uncomfortable, as they were seen as fundamentalists.

We should no longer be passive citizens, but active ones in order to make progress in inter-religious dialogue and to actively contribute to the community. Also, prejudices have to be dismantled.

To achieve this, Mohamed himself is involved in a range of projects, including prison rehabilitation of Muslim delinquents and hospital visits. He is also in touch with Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and secular communities.

Ove Ullestad

He says that Protestants are a minority in the Alsace region in France, which Strasbourg is a part of. The Alsace counts 250,000 Protestants and 140,000 Muslims.

In 1995, the Protestant churches set up a special service for Muslims as well. Round table discussions were organised among different religious groups. These encounters and meetings are considered to be very important in order to bring people closer together. Long term projects have to be carried out to continue the meetings and dialogues. These projects are vital for the future, since we have to live and work together.

After the lectures a discussion followed; participants could ask questions to the speakers. The areas of the questions varied a lot, the following ones can be distinguished:

- Muslim organisations in France
- Priorities for Muslim women
- Minority religions in France
- Inter-religious dialogue among Protestants and Muslims
- Interpretation of the Quran
- Engagements with individuals and organisations who are not involved in dialogue

Lecture by Fadime Örgü, MP for the Liberal Party (VVD) in The Netherlands

Mrs. Örgü spoke about the situation of Muslims in Europe and then focussed on the Muslims in The Netherlands.

Outcome

Most participants found it quite a task to listen to lectures all day. Of course they understood that there was no other option, as both the local community leaders and the Dutch MP could only make it on Friday.

Some of the lectures were received enthusiastically by the participants, some were not. Considering the lectures from the locals, participants especially appreciated Hatice Sahin's and Ove Ullestad's contribution. The lecture of Mrs. Örgü had a very interesting topic, but the participants thought it was not as interesting as it could have been.

Saturday 13th of December

Follow up workshops

Introduction

After a very good energizer from the start of the morning, the morning session with the Follow-up workshop was started.

The team summarized aims and objectives of the study session and how the group by various activities throughout the week had worked toward these.

Based on the review workshops the team suggested, the participants split into three different follow-up workshops, namely;

1. **Organizational policy** (topics to be dealt with at a political level in the organisations in order to make the leadership and the grass roots of the organizations work in the same direction)
2. **Organizational practical** (Ideas for practical issues / projects to do on an organizational level)
3. **Local actions** (Actions to be taken locally with or without the assistance from the organization)

After presenting the above workshops, each participant was asked to write down their own personal wishes for a follow-up.

Organizational practical

Description of the activity

There was a group of five girls that wanted to do something concrete in practice. First they discussed expectations and what kind of problem they would like to deal with. Then came up with aims and objectives such as raising education, raising awareness – not only religion but social issues as well. They group thought of an experience for target groups in the workshops/ seminars/ classes as well as how to exchange ideas and opinions and of interaction between organizations' volunteers, target group, experts. One of the aims was to create friendships and have fun for actors and participants as well. It was furthermore debated how to reach people that are not involved in that sort of organizations. The group would like to see different organisations' resources being used as well as a start up of an EVS (European Voluntary Service) with follow-up seminars.

Participant's response

At first the participants found it difficult due to different backgrounds and different knowledge level. One of the difficulties was also different aspects and lack of ideas. At the end though, the group managed to find similarities in propositions and came up with a project proposal, "Europe in Dialogue";

OUTPUT - Europe in Dialogue

Aims/Objectives

It was decided to produce a collection of workshops there are to be run by the follow-up group and would address community issues. Different organisations' resources ought to be used and start up EVS (European Volunteer Service), with follow-up seminars. The overall aim being to "reach the un-reached people". Primary objective is to raise education level and awareness.

Content of workshops

Stereotypes and prejudices should be addressed as well as the need for basic knowledge on Religion and Culture and how is it in practice. The project should deal with European identity at the unity and diversity level.

Target group

The target group would be age 15 to 25 from different backgrounds (universities, schools, volunteers...) and it is foreseen to use these institutes as a forum and venue for the workshops. Youth clubs would be another idea.

Initial steps

It was realised that there is a need of finding a steering group that can research funding (e.g. EU's Youth programme Action 2 – EVS), find sponsors and approach prospective participating organizations and later EVS volunteers.

Useful materials for organizing workshops

Having the above in mind, the group thought about useful web pages that can be used and be helpful;

■ www.training-youth.net

■ www.eycb.coe.int

■ http://europe.eu.int/youth/program/index_en.html

you with information about the education packs, the second link is to the EYC and the third is useful for information about the youth programme.

Organizational policy

Participants Responses

This work group was supposed to discuss organizational policy on what would be the outcome of the session. The discussion was about what to propose to the national YFU organization and how to multiply the subject.

As it people in the group come from very different background they divided the group in two. In one group was participants from countries where there are only small minority communities and the issue of intercultural dialogue is not on the agenda. The other group consisted of two participants from countries where you find many and large minority communities.

Activity in group 1

The group discussed raising awareness of minority groups among YFU volunteers and also among people in general. The group talked about how to approach national YFU organizations and also decision making bodies. To get all people in the Study Session involved with the start the groups proposed to write a proposal to YFU-EEE board, chairmen and national directors at the European Conference 2004.

Outcome in the group nr 1

The group came out with a proposal to national YFU organisations and to the European Conference to be held in March 2004.

Proposal

Dec, 13 2003 Strasbourg, France

We propose this paper for consideration by the YFU-EEE board, chairmen and national directors at the European Conference 2004

As discussed at the IRS (International Responsibility Seminar, 23-28th of Oct 2003 in Waide, Estonia) 2003 and Study Session (8-14th of Dec 2003 in Strasbourg, France) we see that many minority groups (different religious, ethnic, nationalities etc.) are not represented in the YFU structures.

YFU as a non-religious organization should try to accommodate as many minority groups as possible in our exchange programs.

The outcome of IRS and Study Session, we propose:

- YFU to work towards developing cooperation with local/national minority organizations;
- in order to exchange experience and include minority groups in the exchange programs we propose to build up a network of up to five European YFU national organizations to work with minority issues;
- within the minority network countries we should start voluntary programs and exchanges, internships etc.
- having this experience we should start establishing YFU office in different countries where Islam is the main religion;

YFU should continue the discussion and ensure issues relating to on Islam are on the agenda but at them same time treat all young people of different religions equally.

Through this paper we as YFU volunteers would like to raise awareness, exchange experience with minority issues and challenge prejudice in our countries.

We are looking forward engaging on a discussion in European Conference 2004.

This paper was formulated by:
22 participants joined with this proposal.

Activity in group 2

The Group discussed how national organization could involve more Muslim students and host families in YFU's work.

Outcome in the group nr 2

To get concert they came out with the following *action plan*

"ROAD MAP TO BRIDGE GAPS"

Objectives

- Raise awareness of European Islam
- Emphasize the importance of dialogue among cultures
- Dismantle stereotypes and prejudices especially stressed by media
- Bridge gaps by acting as multipliers
- Underline the competence of youth organisations in the dialogue

Aims

- Muslim students on exchange programmes
- Muslim host families in our countries
- Set up YFU offices, e.g. in Turkey

Action plan

- Establish contact with local Muslim Youth Organisations as an individual
- Establish contact with national Muslim Youth Organisations as a YFU-representative
- Recruit members of those Muslim Youth Organisations to play a significant role within YFU
- Start small: one week exchange between YFU Netherlands and YFU Germany
- Establish contact to European Exchange Organisations that are already experienced with exchange to e.g. Turkey...

The idea is;

**Islam IN Europe – a dialogue BETWEEN cultures →
EUROPEAN ISLAM – dialogues AMONG cultures**

Local actions follow up workshop

Participants

Sunduss, Ieva, Canan, Nina, Cornelia, Anahit, Zivile, Hester, Desiree, Ruksana, Külliki, Peter.

Description of the activity

The participants in the workshop were given the opportunity to present their ideas and wishes for this particular workshop in order to take this under consideration in the discussions during the workshop.

The group decided to make a "road map to dialogue" in order to make it easy for every participant to go back home and actually perform some grass root-action, either with or without the help from their organization. Included in this "road map to dialogue" was also a lot of good ideas to activities.

In the process of making this, the participants did some brainstorming, and in the end each participant had to commit to a certain activity or project, that they should take home to work with (see below)

Participants response

During the activity, there was often a debate regarding which words to use to describe the objective and the aim, and this was found a bit unsatisfactory during the process. However, the outcome of the activity embraced the wishes that were put forward in the beginning of the workshop by each participant, thus giving an overall good impression.

Outcome - "Road map to local dialogue"

Objective

Based on the study session (and the IRS in Estonia), the objective is to make Muslim and non-Muslim youth exchange ideas and experiences through active participation.

Aims

- To make a distinction between culture / tradition and religion in order to raise awareness.
- Creating awareness of Europe as multi-religious and diverse
- To bring out positive aspects, not just negative at all levels
- Bring people together to share experiences through active participation
- Getting recognition for achievements
 - Young European Citizens Award
 - Articles in local newspapers

Target groups

Young people that belong to any of the following categories;

- Attending schools
- Students at universities or other higher educational levels
- Youth from underprivileged communities / areas
- Attending leisure centres

Proposal

To encourage recreational activities and to unite young people with different background and beliefs.

Activities

One of the key issues was to "design" the activities based on the level of young people's participation. E.g. for youngsters attending school, the idea of funny activities are more attractive than participating in a seminar with big political issues on the agenda.

Suggestions for activities were:

- Environmental activities such as
 - Plant a tree
 - Adopt a park / care for a neglected area
- Sports activities
 - Bowling, soccer, pool, belly dancing
 - Things to consider:
 - Should the activity be for women only?
 - Could it be sponsored for instance by the company in the Netherlands producing sports headscarves or similar companies?
 - Should there be a trophy, certificate or similar?
- Cultural evenings (with focus on e.g. food, music, arts)
- Food and cooking courses (these could be used to raise money for other events)
- Informal, open seminars
- Board game activities / tournaments (Chess, Monopoly, Trivial Pursuit etc.)
- Exhibitions (e.g. Discover Islam)
- University level activities
 - Get speakers / lecturers through the network established at the Study Session)
 - Work within the Islamic University Societies

Link to activities at the European level

There are some upcoming events in the coming year, that some of the local activities can be related to. These are:

- Week against racism (march 2004)
- "Culture of Peace" – a project that European Youth Forum is currently working with.

Methodology / how to get started

- Establish contacts (or use existing) to create a diverse team to carry out the activity.
 - E.g. through FEMYSO
 - Individuals
 - Partner organizations

- Existing networks (who do I know?)
- Funding
 - Identify local, national or European funding and/or grants
 - Booklets / web pages through European Youth Forum
- Use the Yahoo Group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Islam-in-Europe>) to get ideas.
- Investigate, what kind of resources are needed
- Facilities and venues needed
- In order to get in touch with the target group (the young people), it will sometimes be a good idea to use "gatekeepers", being teachers or leaders / contacts in the local community that have an influence on the target group.

Commitments from participants

Ruksana (U.K.)

- Arts activity with focus on Ceramic
- Different religious and non-religious groups
- Have contacts in APNA Arts

Canan (Turkey)

- Environment approach – gathering local people to care and look after mosque, school or park.
- Will use TAUW for contacts – has large networks within the organization

Ieva (Lithuania)

- Media contact – will write an article to raise awareness
- Establish contact with youth Muslim organization to plan a treasure hunt in the forest
- Cultural evenings

Hester (the Netherlands)

- Cultural evening with food and music
- Raise awareness through media (has journalist contacts)

Zivile (Lithuania)

- Ice skating tournament
- Tree planting during the Anti-Racism week (march 2004)
- Use media to raise awareness of these events

Anahit (Armenia)

- Educational approach through seminars with open discussion
- Cultural evenings (will investigate donation and grant possibilities)

Cornelia (U.K.)

- College day during the Anti-racism week. On a college try to raise awareness by getting each department on the college to work with their fields of interest within the topic.
- Muslim organizations to be actively involved

Nina (Germany)

- Caring for buildings and parks
- Cultural evenings

Desirée (Sweden)

- To use YFU-seminars to reach the exchange students on program in Sweden. This will be done through the use of discussions, board games etc.

Peter (Denmark)

- Do board game activities in order to establish diverse team for future activities
- Cultural evenings

- Seminar within YFU-Denmark for volunteers (April 2004)

Conclusion / presentation of follow-up outcome

Description of the activity

The members of the EEE-YFU board joined the entire group for the afternoon plenary session, where the outcome of the three different follow-up workshops (see above) was presented.

“Local actions” and “Organizational practical”

The results of these two workshops were presented without any further questions.

Organizational policy

This group had decided to divide themselves in two groups as described above.

Group 1 (Participants from Poland, Estonia and Lithuania)

These countries do not have a big representation of Muslims. The group presented their draft paper / proposal, which was to be put forward for the European Conference 2004 (the General Assembly of YFU in Europe).

Group 2 (Participants from Germany and the Netherlands)

These two countries already have a large minority of Muslims. The group presented their outcome as well and ended up saying, that the theme for this seminar should have been *“European Islam – dialogues among cultures”*

Feedback to the presentations

After the presentations, the plenary was open for feedback. The EEE-YFU board was impressed by the concrete planning, and encouraged the participants to give feedback to EEE-YFU and FEMYSO on projects or activities completed after the study session. They also acknowledged the fact that establishing exchanges with Muslim countries was a high priority, and attempts were already done with i.e. Morocco.

Evaluation

Description of the activity

Evaluation was based on everyone's personal experiences during this Study Session. First, everyone was asked to take off the shoes. Participants were confused, because they didn't know, what was going on. Second, participants and IOT members gathered together in one room, and were asked to lie down on the floor and keep quiet. Although, it was quit unexpected, everyone was curious and anxious to start an evaluation. Third, one of the IOT members put on relaxation music and asked to relax from the fingertips till the very top of the body. It was a good beginning of the dream walk, which had started a couple of weeks before the Study Session. For instance, everyone had to remember how he/she prepared for this event, travelled to the Youth Centre, met new faces, participated in groups and etc. It was a good way to look through this week. The main point was to evaluate the Study Session for him/herself - silently. Finally, the journey finished by 'coming' back to the room, feeling the body, opening the eyes. Everyone looked relaxed – maybe a bit sleepy – but serious.

Participant's response

Some participants liked this kind of evaluation because...

- It was unexpected;
- Music, Mohammed's silent voice, words, everything created special atmosphere, which helped to concentrate and look through the whole Study Session;
- It had a certain purpose, which was reached.

Others said:

- It was uncomfortable to lay down on the floor;
- It was too cold;
- The IRS members had tried it before and some of them were not satisfied to do that kind of evaluation again.

Outcome

Every single person understood, what he/she had learned, what new experiences they were bringing back home, what further action should be taken either at the local or the European level. The evaluation of the week helped to compare where we were before the Study Session and where we are now.

Closing plenary

Description of the activity

To wrap up the whole seminar, there was a closing plenary to let all participants and IOT members say what they would like to say. After a few participants had said "thank you", a round was taken where all had to say one word to express how they felt, and also to express what they had gained from the seminar to bring back home.

The following words and gains were mentioned;

Words to express a feeling

- | | | | |
|---------------|------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| • Inspired | • Confidence | • Great | • Chocolate-flavoured |
| • Satisfied | • Changed | • Optimistic | (very tasty) |
| • Challenging | • Energy | • Verified | • Big |
| • Fine | • Perspective | • Ideas | • Empowered |
| • Weird | • Responsibility | • Filled | • Relevant |
| • Idealistic | • Courage | • Confused | • Relieved |
| • Unique | • Hopeful | • Grateful | |
| | • Interesting | • Thought provoking | |

What have you gained / learned?

- Tolerance towards Islam
- Hope
- Peace should be based on similarities among people, and not differences
- Increase awareness of Muslim Representation in organisations
- Knowledge

To end the closing plenary, Oliver Wagner thanked the participants on behalf of EEE-YFU, and Sunduss thanked on behalf of FEMYSO and said the closing prayer in cooperation with Olya.