

## Secretary General's Report - June 2019

### The European Council of Religious Leaders

As Secretary General I am pleased to report that 2018-19 has been an exceptionally busy and productive year for the European Council of Religious Leaders; with a number of key projects near completion and the preparation for the World Assembly in Lindau in August 2019 well advanced. Some key areas to report on include:

#### Administrative and Legal Obligations

- ECRL completed its registration in Brussels late 2018 as requested by the Council. Whilst this gives us a desired presence in Brussels we must also ensure that we understand and fulfill reporting obligations as stipulated by the Belgium government.
- In line with the Council statutory regulations the Executive Committee met twice in the previous year; in Paris on the 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2018, and in Berlin (as guests of the German Federal Foreign Office) on the 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2019. Agendas and minutes are available to all Council members on request.
- Clusters continue to be populated and we currently have 32 members, out of a possible 42. Vice Presidents are regularly encouraged to seek new members, and we are making some progress in fully populating the Council. In line with our strategic commitments, we have also increased our number of women members.
- The ECRL Secretariat has taken on a number of extra staff on a consultancy basis in order to deal with the significantly increased workload resulting from World Assembly preparations. This includes: a financial assistant (Tamsyn Beach), administrative assistant (Imogen Flatau), and Youth and Women of Faith coordinator (Joanna Owen). Please respond to them if they contact you about ECRL business.

#### Project Reports

##### **1. Religion and Migration in Europe**

This project resulted from ECRL's 2016 annual meeting in Brixen, Italy, and commitment to contribute positively to the integration experience of migrants, refugees and host communities. ECRL has been working in partnership with the University of Winchester on examining 'Multireligious Approaches to Integration'. Over the last year phase 2 of the project has been completed, resulting in an academic publication, and soon to be published practical handbook which will give

advice to organisations and communities about the benefits of multireligious engagement on integration. Two roundtable discussions on the subject are also being organised in the UK and Germany; and ECRL members will be kept informed.

## **2. Religion and State Constitutions**

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) approached the European Council of Religious Leaders ECRL in 2017 with the view to carrying out a project that examines which political and constitutional models are seen most favourably by religious communities and best help prevent contradictions and tensions between politics, law and freedom of religious practice and belief. As a result ECRL agreed to be a full partner in the 'Religious Perspectives on Constitutional Values Programme'. Over the last year researchers have been collecting data from ECRL members and other senior religious leaders on Freedom of Religious Belief and constitutional models. A draft report has now been submitted to IDEA and we await their feedback.

## **3. Religions in Action**

Religions in Action is an innovative, interactive online platform which can be used by religious organizations and faith groups from all communities to showcase positive and successful examples of multireligious collaboration and peacebuilding projects within Europe. The website is modelled around the four key themes which will inform the RfP World Assembly:

- Transforming Conflict
- Promoting Just and Harmonious Societies
- Advancing Sustainable, Integral Human Development
- Protecting the Earth

The website is currently being populated, and can be visited at:

<http://religion-in-action.eu>

## **4. MENA /ECRL Partnership on Migration**

In December 2018 in Abu Dhabi 30 senior leaders of different faith communities from MENA and EU countries, together with experts on migration, held two days of intensive conversation about mass migration in MENA and its impact in EU regions. Organised jointly by the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies and the European Council of Religious Leaders they explored the distinctive and crucial role religious leaders can play in addressing the practical and spiritual needs of migrants and sharing understanding of its causes and effects in both regions. They focussed especially on how to establish greater co-operation between religious leaders in both regions. Migration creates major though different problems in each region and it was agreed that there is a need for robust dialogue between the regions about these challenges. Participants unanimously agreed to set up an interim working group to develop proposals for how inter-regional religious collaboration can be advanced, and ECRL will play a lead in this post World Assembly.

## **5. World Assembly Preparation – Women and Youth**

At the request of RfP International ECRL has carried out work scoping the existing women and youth networks, and helping identify new potential members. ECRL also facilitated a Women and Youth of Faith consultation on the five assembly themes in Warsaw in April 2019. A report is currently being written which will feed into RfP International's World Assembly preparation and strategy.

### **External Partners and Engagement**

Much of the last year has been taken up with World Assembly preparations, and our President in particular has been a regular visitor to Berlin and Lindau to take part in preparation meetings and consultations. Our relationship with the German government and Lindau Foundation is potentially extremely important for the future development of ECRL.

### **Financial Report**

Over the last year we have received significant income from RfP International for World Assembly preparation (see financial statement and report). However, all of this funding is ring-fenced for specific activities and therefore cannot be spent on core running costs. Our income and expenditure remain very modest for an organisation of ECRL's size and prestige, and post-World Assembly more effort needs to be placed into ensuring ECRL develops a sustainable financial strategy for the future.

### **Summary**

As Secretary General I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the ECRL members for their support, dedication and efforts in sustaining and developing the organisation, and helping ensure that ECRL can continue to make a positive and tangible contribution to overcoming many of the difficult challenges faced in Europe today. I would also like to personally thank President Thomas Wipf for his unwavering support and Secretariat Manager Rebecca Bellamy for all her hard work.

ECRL continues to operate on a very limited budget, and could not continue without the generous support of members. Many thanks once again to members who have over the last year donated as individuals or through their respective organisations, and/or in kind by supporting our meetings and activities.



Dr Mark Owen  
**Secretary General – European Council of Religious Leader.**