

# Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe aisbl



## **EYCE Circular Letter December 2010**

Dear National Correspondents and Members of EYCE!

Greetings from Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe in time, when the Christian world is waiting for the new beginning in Our Lord Jesus Christ! I hope this finds you well! During the year 2010 EYCE has gone through many events and activities. To many of those you have been witnesses, and of many you have heard from someone. At the end of this year EYCE would like to summarise the events of 2010, and give you a short insight into the year 2011, which we hope to spend in such a warm atmosphere as this one.

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***Dear members and partners of EYCE,  
Dear Friends!***

Christmas Greetings from the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe!

As Christmas is coming closer and the New Year will start soon, I want to invite you to look back at EYCE's year 2010 and to already take a short look into 2011 with us.

God's promise to human beings, which can be found in Isaiah 41, 10 has helped us with our work in EYCE and strengthened us in various situations throughout the year 2010:

*Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.*

This promise enables young people in EYCE to raise their voices on different occasions and to take action. It gives us as young Christians the courage to speak up when injustice and prejudice seem to dominate the contexts we live in, leaving no space for dignity, justice and peace. The promise reminds us also that we are depending on God's grace and can act only to some extent that is given to us.

Therefore, the promise that God is always with us liberates us from pressures and expectations, which we meet that meet us every day and seem to become overwhelming from time to time.

We, in EYCE, have felt that this promise comes true again and again throughout our work. We notice it during our seminars and training courses, during representations to our partner organisations, or the European institutions or in internal processes.

In 2010, we have held were running four different activities training courses and seminars on various issues. Many of you may have participated in these events: "Democracy for all!", "Facing the Economic Crisis", "Climate Justice Now!", or "Fundamentalist or Responsible Citizen?". These events have carried EYCE's work all over Europe and have reached many young people. Also EYCE's three year "Campaign to Overcome Fundamentalism", which is coming to its end during these last weeks of 2010, has addressed the various aspects and raised awareness of religious fundamentalism and interreligious dialogue, especially in context of Balkan region and migrant communities in Europe. This Campaign has shaped EYCE's thematic work from 2008-2010 and greatly enriched us all, especially because of the work of our Leadership Team (LT).

We are very thankful, that trough the activities of EYCE in 2010 partnerships with other ecumenical and faith based youth organisations have been fulfilled and strengthened!

2011 will see the launch of our new "Campaign to Promote Ecological Justice" that will shape our thematic work until 2013. We are looking forward to this Campaign and to work with you in its context!



At the same time, internal meetings and processes have accompanied us. I would especially like to highlight the meeting of the Steering Committee for Future Development (SC) and the National Correspondent's meeting, which took place this year. Both meetings have shown the commitment and responsibility of our member organisations for EYCE and enable us to design the future of the Ecumenical Youth in Europe.

Towards the end, I would like to thank all of you, who contributed to EYCE's work in the past year as IPC members, National Correspondents, writers, donors, LT or SC members, office volunteers, or ExCo members and office staff. You are the ones that fill the four letters of EYCE with life and meaning!

May the confidence in the Lord be with you in 2011 to strengthen you and give you peace!

We thank you for your support and the strong fellowship during this year and wish you a blessed Christmas!

Yours in Christ,  
Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe



## ***EYCE's activities during the year 2010***

### ***Democracy for all!***

**A training course for youth leaders fostering inter-generational dialogue.  
18th - 25th of April 2010, Tallinn, Estonia**



Today, when there are numerous changes and major decisions needed in many societies, it has to be asked how and by whom these decisions are being made that affect the whole society. A responsible decision taking is a social responsibility to be taken up by everybody in order to ensure fairness, equality and justice. With this training course, EYCE wanted to tackle this complex system of inter-generational responsibility in democratic societies. The training course aimed at exploring the themes related to the participation of

all groups in society and its success due to a meaningful dialogue between the generations. It focused on questions such as: Is there a certain group in the society that concentrates the power? What are the differences in values and needs for this group? Are there possibilities to make a change in those decision making processes? Is there a possibility to bring in values that would bring more justice, responsibility and equality to decision making on behalf of others? The main aim of the activity was to train young Christians to actively participate in responsible and democratic decision making processes and equipping them with tools in lobbying, advocacy work and campaigning. This training course also aimed at providing young people with practical skills and information to contribute with ideas for concrete activities regarding the issue on a local, regional and national level.

A variety of methods were used: lectures, case studies, creative presentations, individual reflections and concrete training on project planning. Further work in small regional groups aimed at developing concrete and sustainable programmes to be implemented at home.

The event brought together 17 young people coming from mainly Eastern Europe. They brought a variety of cultural, social and denominational backgrounds into the training course,

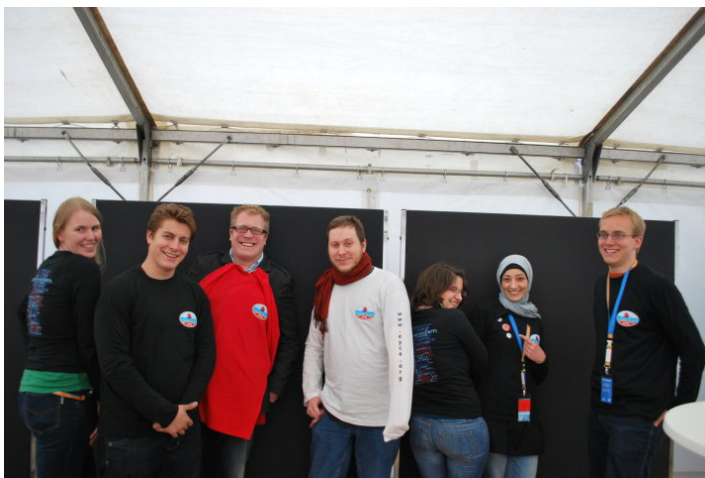


sharing their experiences and enriching other participants' knowledge, thus contributing largely to acknowledge the European dimension of the training course.

Even though the participants were coming from various social, cultural and religious backgrounds, most of them came from countries where the questions of decision making and participation in democratic processes are not very much discussed, thus very relevant and necessary to raise. Therefore, the content of the training course, discussions and achievements were determined very much by the direct experiences or work of participants. These experiences very much enriched the content of the training course and served as a learning element.

### ***Campaign to Overcome Fundamentalism in 2nd Ecumenical Kirchentag 12<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> of May, Munich, Germany***

Within the framework of the Campaign to Overcome Fundamentalism there were three workshops for young people held during the 2nd Ecumenical Kirchentag in Munich Germany. The Second Ecumenical Kirchentag took place from 12th - 16th of May and brought together several thousand people of various denominations and religious backgrounds.



The workshops gathered young people from Germany and beyond and presented the main ideas of the Campaign to Overcome Fundamentalism in various forms and by using various methods. The three different workshops focused on the themes of inter-religious encounters, religious identity and communication among people from various faith backgrounds. The workshops were run by the members of the Leadership Team of the Campaign and the volunteers from Germany.

The workshop held on Thursday, the 13th of May focused mainly on various practical aspects of inter-religious encounters. The participants worked in two groups, each of which analysed a case study highlighting another aspect of inter-religious dialogue.

The first case study described an inter-religious group trip: when the hostel does not anticipate the Muslim participants and asks them to sit at a separate table, they feel excluded. The participants were asked to discuss how they, as a member of the group for this trip, would



cope with the situation. Various ideas, how to resolve the situation, were presented by the participants, e.g. helping the kitchen staff with serving in order to ensure that everyone receives an appropriate meal or to have a vegetarian meal suitable for all participants.

The second case described an inter-religious event: just before it starts, two participants tell the organisers that their spiritual father has forbidden them to participate in common prayers during the event. The participants agreed, that no one should be forced to attend a prayer no matter, what reasons ever she/he might have. However there were proposals to encourage the participants to attend the prayers as enriching experience, still highlighting that it is not compulsory.

After analysing both of the cases, the participants of the workshop agreed, that the spiritual aspect is much more complicated and requires more sensitivity to be dealt with. Nevertheless, the practical aspects are of equal importance and should be attended to with care.

The workshop held on Friday, the 14th of May focused on the religious identity and the place of it in the identity of participants as such.

Each of the participants was asked to draw a star, where each corner of it would represent a keystone of their identity. The various aspects of their identity and the role/ influence the faith has in their life were discussed by the participants. The participants were encouraged to ask to focus on those questions individually and then discuss them with other participants, coming from different faith background. The discussion resulted in conclusion, that it is possible for people from various faith backgrounds to live together and cooperate in various ways, despite of the different views and beliefs.

The workshop "Hope? With respect!", held on Saturday, the 15th of May focused on the more detailed question of inter-religious dialogue - the religious education in schools, which in reality incorporates much vaster question of religious identity, religious symbols and presence of religion in the social sphere. Should there be a separate, confessional religious education for each bigger religious group, with Ethics being the option for non-believers? Or should children spend all their school time together, discussing religion from an objective perspective? Those were the questions raised during the roleplay in the third workshop. Yet the main focus of the activity was on communication. How to communicate in a way that will help us reach a certain level of understanding and promote an acceptable solution? The hope theme of Kirchentag was approached by raising awareness about communication strategies and by presenting an exceptionally difficult communication situation.

The Christian, Muslim and Atheistic views were represented through the roleplay and a situation was created, when the arguments of the other parties involved are not respected and even ignored. The participants were involved in solving the situation in an interactive way - anyone from the audience could shout "Freeze!" and exchange the role with any of the "actors" in the roleplay. The participants at all times were trying to suggest viable solutions. At times the roles played were mixed with the own beliefs of the participants and personal experiences of promoting religious understanding in local schools were shared. Altogether the workshop set



an example of a very understanding-oriented communication.

During all three of the workshops also EYCE and its working areas was presented. The Campaign to Overcome Fundamentalism, run in cooperation with Federation of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO) was presented and the participants were invited to join and contribute to the Campaign.

EYCE would like to thank the workshop team once again for their contribution and the good work done!

### ***Facing the Economic Crisis – role and possibilities of youth organizations*** **1<sup>st</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2010, Klaipeda, Lithuania**

Educational projects for Roma minority, projects addressing youth and senior employment, youth exchange featuring intercultural dialogue, projects with orphans and ideas on how to raise the economically positive thinking in Iceland were among many of the creative ideas discussed during the EYCE summer event on economic justice. The EYCE summer training “Facing the Economic Crisis – role and possibilities of youth organisations” took place from 1<sup>st</sup>



– 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2010 in Klaipeda, Lithuania, bringing together a diverse and creative group of participants.

This training course was organised in cooperation with the local partner Taurage Evangelical Lutheran Parish and was an event directly following up the mandate of the EYCE General Meeting.

The event brought together more than 24 participants coming from all over Europe and beyond, with different cultural, social and denominational backgrounds, creating a unique and diverse basis for the discussions on the economic situation in various countries, and the positions of young people in these situations. Furthermore, the possible contributions of young people addressing these socially challenging situations were discussed by the participants.

During the training course inputs of three different guest speakers were provided to view the themes of the training course from various aspects. Entrepreneur and economist Jānis Ošlejs from Latvia gave an overview of the Economic situation in Europe, the unequal position of



various social groups in Europe and beyond, as well as causes and consequences of these economic injustices. Theologian and Pastor Daniel Müller-Thor from Germany provided the theological aspects of economic justice, as well as touched upon the role of churches, and young people in churches in particular in order to address the economic injustices on various levels in Europe. The final part of the training course focused on practical work in order to address the economic injustice, as well as the fundraising possibilities and financial management of the youth organisations. Guest speaker Paul Welch from the United Kingdom gave a valuable input for the practical part of the training course.

Participants contributed actively to the process of the training course with their experiences and knowledge of the subject, and enriched the atmosphere of the event greatly with the creative approaches to the activities.

### ***CLIMATE JUSTICE NOW!***

**12<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2010, European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, France**

Raising awareness of the complex topic of climate justice, its causes and consequences and



the responsibility of humankind towards creation are the issues tackled by a statement, which was developed and adopted by the participants of the EYCE and WSCF-E study session "Climate Justice Now!", which took place from 12th - 18th of September 2010 in the European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, France.

The study session was organised in cooperation with the World Student

Christian Federation Europe Region (WSCF-E) and the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe and was an event directly following up the mandate of the EYCE General Meeting in 2009 to address environmental issues in the work of EYCE. It precedes the three year EYCE Campaign to promote Ecological Justice, which will be launched in 2011.

The study session brought together more than 24 participants from all over Europe and beyond, with different cultural, social and denominational backgrounds, creating a unique and diverse basis for discussions on the ecological situation in various countries, and the role and responsibility of young Christians in these situations.

During the study session inputs of three different guest speakers provided the overview of the themes discussed from various aspects - legal, theological and practical. Lawyer and Human



Rights expert Cosmin Corendea from Romania gave an overview of the legal situation concerning climate justice and sustainability in the European Union. WCC's Working Group on Climate Change member Ilkka Sipiläinen from Finland presented various projects and campaigns practised in different European countries, fostering projects of the Finnish Lutheran Church. The Rev. Peter Pavlovic, staff member of the Church and Society Commission of CEC, gave an overview of the theological aspects of Christian responsibility towards creation and the concepts of eco- theology.

The participants acknowledged the strong need to promote climate justice as a Human Right and developed a common statement calling for more awareness and action. The statement highlights rethinking our excessive consumerism and the consideration of alternative ways of life. It also points out the need for the improvement of climate education involving all parts of society as being a crucial part of the change. The statement claims the recognition of climate refugees as an official category in the UNHCR-statutes.

Participants contributed actively to the process of the study session with their experiences and knowledge of the subject, and enriched the atmosphere of the event greatly with their creative approaches to the activities.

### ***EYCE ExCo and National Correspondents meeting*** **8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> of October, Belfast, Northern Ireland**



From 8th-12th of October 2010 the National Correspondents, the Executive Committee and the Office staff of the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe met in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Subsequently, from 12th-14th of October the meeting of EYCE's Executive Committee (ExCo) took place at the same venue. During the National Correspondents meeting issues concerning the role and future of EYCE were discussed, as well as significant time was

allocated for meeting and networking meeting with delegates from churches and youth organisations from the U.K., Ireland, and Northern Ireland. Among other items on the agenda



the creation of a manual for the National Correspondents, which should be a guide through the structures and work of EYCE and the special role of the National Correspondents as ambassadors, promoters and communicators, was reviewed. The manual will be created and used as a practical work guide originating from the experience of former National Correspondents, Office and ExCo. During the networking meeting with representatives from CYMFed, the Church of Ireland's Youth Department and the Department of Youth and Childrens Work of the Methodist Church of Ireland the group discussed the best ways of cooperation between EYCE and the youth organisations present. The meeting was very fruitful and the participants showed great motivation to deepen the contacts initiated. Furthermore, during the National Correspondents meeting a midterm evaluation of the ExCo's work and a discussion on the outcomes of the work of the Steering Committee on EYCE's Future Development were took place.

During their meeting the ExCo reviewed and evaluated the work that has been done since their last meeting in June 2010 in Klisursky, Bulgaria, as well as the outcomes of the National Correspondents meeting. Moreover, the further development of the "Campaign to Promote Ecological Justice" to be launched in January 2011, and the preparation for EYCE's 38th General Meeting, which will take place in October 2011 hosted by EYCE's German Member Organisation "aej", were discussed.

Much time of the ExCo meeting was dedicated to the concrete planning of EYCE's further activities, e.g. the conference "Fundamentalist or Responsible Citizen?", which will take place in Sarajevo in December 2010, events for the year 2011 and the upcoming EYCE "Campaign to Promote Ecological Justice" to be launched in January 2011. The evaluation of the National Correspondents meeting, including the networking meeting with representatives from churches and youth organisations from the U.K., Ireland, and Northern Ireland, took place alongside with practical planning for implementation of the concrete suggestions in the work of the Office and ExCo. Also the update on the work of the Steering Committee on EYCE's Future Development and its implications for the work of the ExCo was discussed as a part of this evaluation.

The ExCo also reviewed the involvement and cooperation with other ecumenical and religious bodies in Europe, such as WSCF-E and the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO), including the engagement into the WCC "Poverty, Wealth and Ecology" programme in 2010. In addition, the ExCo used the opportunity to officially welcome the new office volunteer Vera Kockler from Germany.

During the last day of the meeting, the ExCo visited the new office of Youth Link, the local ecumenical youth organisation and member of EYCE. Both partners expressed their will to reinforce the cooperation.



***Fundamentalist of Responsible Citizen?***

**Contribution of religious communities to formation of European citizens**

**28th November to 5th December 2010 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina**



“Our aim was to propose ways, in which young religious European citizens can take a more active role in fulfilling their duties towards society as a whole”, declare the participants of the conference “Fundamentalist of Responsible Citizen? Contribution of religious communities to formation of European citizens” in their final statement.

The conference was held from 28th November to 5th December 2010 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and brought together more than 50 young Europeans from various religious backgrounds. The event was organized by the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) in cooperation with the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO) and the Interreligious Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina (IRC). This conference marked the final step of the three-year Campaign to Overcome Fundamentalism. This project aimed at addressing various aspects of religious fundamentalism and raising awareness of this phenomenon. At the same time, it promoted the necessity for inter-religious dialogue. The participants for this conference came from various Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities, as this was also the case in the other activities of the Campaign.

The conference was officially opened by a greeting from Husejin ef. Smajic, Sarajevo Mufti, President of the Assembly of IRC, followed by a keynote speech entitled „Is fundamentalism challenging for European society?“ by Bashy Quraisy (European Network Against Racism, Denmark).

A large number of guest speakers and workshop leaders contributed to the programme of the conference with their knowledge and expertise. Imam Ajmal Masroor (editor, politician, UK) gave a speech entitled “Fundamentalism – harmful or helpful?”, Greis, a Swiss graffiti-artist, musician (MTV music award 2010 as Best European Act) and social activist gave an insight in his own experiences of being active and performed creative workshops with the participants. In addition, other practical workshops were led by young people from EYCE's network and the Jewish Community Centre in Krakow. During the Open Door afternoon a panel discussion was held with participation of IRC members Ms. Bozana Katava, Dr. Aid Smajic and Ms. Olivera



Jovanovic, as well as Mr. Hasan Patel (BBC journalist, UK). Afterwards, the Swiss beatboxer Knackeboul gave an interactive performance for the opening of the intercultural reception, which was a great success. Towards the end of the week Dirk Thesenvitz (youth officer for Ecumenical and International Youth Work, Germany) spoke about the role of young people in fostering responsible citizenship.

As a result of the week's programme and conclusion of the conference, the participants developed and signed a common statement on the role of young people within the various religious communities in preventing fundamentalism and promoting active involvement in civil society. The statement highlights that various religious and secular communities and the civil society have to work together towards common objectives to develop a fairer society, e.g. by formal, non-formal and informal educational initiatives, various forms of dialogue and collaboration, as well as active engagement of young religious people in civil society!

### ***EYCE Office updates***



Starting from September 2010, EYCE office hosts a new intern - **Ms. Vera Kockler** from Germany.

Vera's internship will last until July 2011 and the main focus in her work will be EYCE's Campaign to Promote Ecological Justice.

Vera has already been part of two International Planning Committees for EYCE's events, and has participated in some others.

She is 28 years old, Protestant united and studied history, French and Arabic at the University of Frankfurt, Germany and one semester at the university of Lille, France.

11 years ago Vera started to work with children and youth on different levels - as a group leader and representing her organization in various committees.



## ***List of EYCE events and Activities in 2011***

There are 4 different events foreseen for the year 2011. Furthermore, EYCE will launch the Campaign to Promote Ecological Justice (2011-2013), which will shape EYCE's thematic work for the coming three years.

The foreseen **events for the year 2011** are:

- 27th February - 6th March: Geneva, Switzerland, "Learn, engage, lead. A step by step leadership training course for young Europeans"
- 3rd - 10th July: Budapest, Hungary or Strasbourg, France, "Secularism and religions working together for a common Europe" - interreligious study session
- 21st - 28th August: Kiev, Ukraine, "Taking steps towards an ecologically responsible society Political and theological perspectives of Ecological Justice", a training course in the framework of the upcoming campaign
- 17th - 23rd October: EYCE's 38th General Meeting, Höchst, Germany
- 27th November - 4th December: a training course on Reconciliation