

**CHURCHES IN EUROPE:  
INITIATIVES TO OVERCOME RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND RACIAL VIOLENCE**

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## INTRODUCTION

In Europe we are witnessing a disturbing new upsurge of racial violence in certain countries. *“In 1999 murder and attempted murder on racial, ethnic, religious or cultural grounds were reported in the national mass media in Austria, France, Spain, Sweden and the UK.”*<sup>1</sup> During this same year, *“there was an increase in the number of recorded racial crimes associated with neo-Nazi groups in Germany and Sweden. In Germany there was a decrease in the total number of criminal offences, but an increase in violent attacks. Racial violence associated with neo-Nazis and skinheads has also been reported in Spain and Portugal where these groups were identified as being responsible for much of the racial violence.”*<sup>2</sup>

It is in this context that the World Council of Churches (WCC), specifically its team “Justice, Peace and Creation” which includes the “Programme to Combat Racism”, decided to undertake a new project on “Churches in Europe: initiatives to overcome racism, xenophobia and racial violence”.

The purpose of this project was to find out about church initiatives in the struggle against racial violence in four European countries: Austria, Germany, Great Britain and France. In the second phase of the project, the results of the research were to be gathered together in a brief publication. This report would be presented to a meeting of the WCC Central Committee, to emphasise and highlight the various initiatives in order to strengthen the churches’ commitment, to encourage the sharing of ideas and to bring about cooperation among the different active groups.

This project is part of the wider effort of the Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence, to be launched in February 2001, and of the WCC’s contribution to the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Associated Intolerance, to be held in September 2001.

Having completed the research phase of the “Churches in Europe” project, we are now ready to present our first findings. The present paper does not in fact cover all the four countries which we initially intended to include. In view of the relatively short period of time available for the research, we will concentrate here on Germany and Austria only, given that this project is to be continued in the future.

As we were not sure what we would find, we had to proceed by asking certain questions in order to establish the scope of the research and define certain concepts. The following are some reflections and observations outlining the progress of our thinking and the approach which we adopted.

The first question which we confronted was whether there were any existing **initiatives devoted solely to combating racial violence**. We quickly discovered that initiatives devoted to this specific problem were rare. Instead, we found programmes and projects aimed at eradicating racism and xenophobia in the broad sense. However, all anti-racism efforts contribute to the struggle against the plague of racially motivated aggression, in the sense that

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<sup>1</sup> European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, Annual Report 1999, Summary, p. 3

<sup>2</sup> loc. cit.

racial violence is only one possible manifestation of racism or xenophobia. Thus, we found few church programmes which were specifically concerned with racial violence.

This observation led us to ask whether it made sense to concentrate solely on the phenomenon of racial violence. Many of the people with whom we spoke said that racist attacks and murders were certainly terrifying and intolerable, but this was partly because of the enormous amount of attention they receive through the media<sup>3</sup>; in fact they were really only “the visible tip of the iceberg”.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the media give far less space to the ordinary racism which far too many people endure in daily life. As for “institutional racism”<sup>5</sup>, for many people it is the most insidious and the most worrying phenomenon.

Is it not an experience of violence for a person to be subjected to prejudice or discrimination because he or she is different? Does not the fact that the police keep systematically checking the identities of the same individuals, even though they have not committed any offence except for the colour of their skin, also constitute a form of violence? When people are expelled as “illegals” (not to mention the physical restraints and brutality which often accompany such expulsions), is this not an act of violence?

All these questions led us to redefine and clarify the idea of racial violence. In fact it seemed to us that we should include “other forms of violence”<sup>6</sup> in addition to physical violence. To return to the same example, being subjected to endless police checks or harassment certainly constitutes a form of moral violence.

### **How can racial violence be combated?**

Two alternatives soon became clear, the first of which is prevention. This can be done through education in schools or in parishes, by holding intercultural seminars for police officers, and by encouraging conversation and contacts between local and foreign residents. The majority of church initiatives are of this type. Their position as institutions which are thoroughly immersed in the society, their moral authority and the message of love and peace which they proclaim, make it logical for churches to be working for an open and tolerant society and thus contributing as far as possible to preventing all racist acts.

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<sup>3</sup> In the summary of its report for the year 1999, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia notes that “Serious acts of racial violence are the racial incidents widely known to the public, because they become - as all serious crimes - headlines in the mass media.”

<sup>4</sup> “The most common racial incidents are not the violent acts covered by the mass media. The official statistics from Germany show that out of a total of 10,037 registered criminal offences with racist/xenophobic motives, 66% fell under the category of propaganda offences. The total number of racially aggravated offences in the UK, from April to September 1999, was 10,982, of which half related to harassment. In Sweden the number of reported crimes with racial/xenophobic incentives was in total 2,363 in 1999. Of these, unlawful threats, assaults and harassment were the three most common types. The number of anti-Semitic crimes in Sweden in 1999 was 125, persecution was the most common type of crime.” European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, op.cit.

<sup>5</sup> “‘Institutional racism’ consists of the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amounts to discrimination through unwitting prejudices, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage ethnic minority people.” “The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry”, report of an inquiry by Sir William MacPherson of Cluny, § 46.25

<sup>6</sup> “While physical violence is easier to recognise, other forms of violence are equally damaging. There is a growing body of evidence that persistent low-level harassment affects the health and well-being of people subjected to it.” Mukami McCrum, “Racial Violence”, Echoes (WCC) 17/2000

The second alternative concerned whether it is possible to do anything about racial violence after it has taken place. Some of the people with whom we spoke believed that pursuing those who commit racist acts, pronouncing them guilty and obtaining justice for the victims was the task of the police and justice departments. Others thought that the church also has a task to do after racial violence has taken place, for example by providing moral support to the victims, by publicizing cases as widely as possible, or by putting pressure on the authorities to see that justice is done.

All these considerations led us by degrees to develop a classification of the initiatives into different types. This is not a rigid system, since many of the initiatives which we will describe could be placed in more than one category, but rather a simple scheme to aid in examining the data.

### **1. Consciousness raising and education**

This is par excellence the preventive type of initiative. There are more consciousness raising and educational initiatives in our file than those of any other type, suggesting that the churches are taking action in this area as a priority. Typically, these are educational programmes for younger and older persons in schools or in parishes – consciousness-raising about persons of foreign origin, and projects aiming to promote contacts and dialogue with these persons.

### **2. Seminars or training programmes aimed at particular professions**

This category is very close to the preceding one. Persons in certain professions, because of the work they are assigned to do, often have contact with immigrants, refugees or simply persons of foreign origin. However, the attitudes and behaviour of police and customs and immigration officers in particular is all too often determined by prejudices with regard to foreigners and can lead to serious abuses. This second type of initiative aims primarily to provide anti-racist training, or to promote contacts with foreigners, so as to dispel suspicions and lack of understanding on both sides.

### **3. Combating the ideas being spread by extreme right, “national socialist”, nationalist or populist parties**

These efforts seek to combat racism and racial violence indirectly. It is true that acts of racial violence are clearly legitimised by the spread of racial and xenophobic thinking in a society.

### **4. Practical protection for persons threatened by, or victims of, racial violence**

Unfortunately we found that this type of initiative is too rare. It would consist of taking concrete action in the neighbourhood to provide shelter for the persons in question. That being said, one might legitimately ask whether churches have the capacity to carry out such a “public safety” task, and whether it is appropriate for them to do so.

### **5. Support for victims of racial violence**

These are cases in which action is taken after racial violence has already happened. The purpose is to listen to the victim, to provide advice and to help him or her in obtaining restitution and justice if desired. Along with this support there may be a public relations effort

to mobilise public opinion and to challenge the authorities to do their job; help may also consist of financial aid to make it possible for the victim to take his or her case to the courts.

As our research progressed, we also wondered whether the idea of **church initiatives** was the right one, in that the reality of the churches' involvement is more complex than the expression "initiative" suggests. This is because the churches are involved in different contexts and in different ways. There are several different configurations: the churches may themselves initiate a given project, but often it is not as clear as that. Sometimes churches may join in initiatives which they did not originate themselves, or may give support to the anti-racism programmes of completely non-religious organisations. In this last case, can we then speak of a church initiative?

This report has naturally given priority to initiatives coming from churches, congregations or ecumenical organisations, but we have also chosen to mention other programmes which were set up outside religious circles, because some of these programmes seemed to us to be both original and much-needed.

It was definitely not our intention to provide an exhaustive list of everything being done by the churches to overcome racism, xenophobia and racial violence. We wanted only to give some examples, as varied as possible, of the numerous anti-racist initiatives more or less closely related to the churches.

This report aims to draw the attention of the churches to the significant work which is being done day after day, in the hope that it will help them to know about one another's actions. It is our hope that this will encourage persons of good will, agents of change, who are directly involved in the projects highlighted in this report. We also hope that this will encourage churches and their partners in Europe and elsewhere to pursue their efforts in overcoming racism and xenophobia.

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## GERMANY

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### CONTEXT GERMANY

<b>Population:</b>	82.1 million
<b>Refugee population 31.12.00:<sup>7</sup></b>	906,000 (as against 975,000 in 1999)
<b>Refugees per 1000 inhabitants:</b>	11.0
<b>Requests for asylum in 2000:<sup>8</sup></b>	78,600 (as against 95,100 in 1999)
<b>Refugee status granted in 2000:<sup>9</sup></b>	13,043
<b>Rate of admission:<sup>10</sup></b>	15.4%
<b>Ratification of the International Convention on the elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination:</b>	15 May 1969

#### UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination main concerns (March 2001):

- Despite appropriate actions undertaken and significant improvements of the different means to prevent and punish right-wing extremist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic crimes, the number of racist related incidents, which more or less stagnated during the 90s, suddenly and dramatically increased during the year 2000.
- Repeated reports of racist incidents in police stations as well as ill-treatment inflicted by law enforcement officials on foreigners, including asylum seekers and German nationals of foreign origin. Although the number of these incidents has diminished recently, the Committee urges the State party to continue its efforts, particularly by strengthening the existing educational measures for civil servants dealing with issues involving foreigners.

*“In Germany, the number of criminal offences with racist/xenophobic motives in 1999 totalled 10,037. More than 66% of these criminal offences fell – as in the previous years – under the category of propaganda offences. In comparison with 1998, the data showed a*

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<sup>7</sup> Source: “Provisional Statistics on Refugees and Others of Concern to UNHCR for the year 2000”, 11 April 2001 (<http://www.unhcr.ch/statist/main.htm>) and “*Les réfugiés dans le monde, cinquante ans d’action humanitaire*”, 2000, United Nations High Commission for Refugees (<http://www.unhcr.ch>).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Source: “Provisional Statistics on Refugees and Others of Concern to UNHCR for the year 2000”, 11 April 2001 (<http://www.unhcr.ch/statist/main.htm>).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

decrease of the total amount of criminal offences with racist motives (down 9.2%) but an increase of violent attacks (plus 5.4%). The number of anti-Semitic desecrations of Jewish cemeteries was 47, which was a decrease from 1998.

In total 746 acts of violence with racist/xenophobic motives were reported. Most violent acts (60%) with racist/xenophobic motives were aimed at people of foreign descent. Two examples:

On 29 September a man from Mozambique died as a result of severe injuries received in an attack on 15 August by a 31 year old German man with xenophobic convictions who hit him during a quarrel in a Bavarian tavern. A warrant of arrest was issued.

On 13 February an Algerian man died as a result of injuries which he suffered as he was running away from a group of skinheads. The perpetrators are to go on trial. The offence was treated by the judge as a "breach of the peace" (Landfriedensbruch) rather than the more serious crime of attempted murder.<sup>11</sup>

As another case demonstrated, immigrants and foreigners are not the only targets of members of xenophobic groups. On 9 August two skinhead members of xenophobic groups broke into an apartment of a 44 year old German national in Eschede, Niedersachsen who had previously criticised the xenophobic attitudes of one of the perpetrators. The skinheads, under the influence of alcohol, inflicted injuries upon the man which resulted in his death a day later. The perpetrators were juveniles and received five year prison sentences.

According to the *Verfassungsschutzbericht*, the estimated number of right wing extremists in Germany in 1999 was 51,400. The total number of members of right wing extremist/neo-Nazi parties and organisations decreased by 2,200 in comparison with 1998. But at the same time as the number of the neo-Nazis slightly decreased, the number of right wing extremist skinheads and other violent right wing extremists continued to rise. Their number is now around 9000.

Cases of ill-treatment of foreigners by the police, in particular members of ethnic minorities and asylum seekers, were reported by Amnesty International.<sup>12</sup> These mainly concerned forcible expulsions of asylum seekers, during which one person was killed. Alleged ill-treatment of asylum-seekers by officials in places of detention were investigated by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment. The Committee made recommendations for the improvement of the physical conditions in the detention centres and requested information about past investigations into alleged ill-treatment by officials.

Amnesty International also reported on the actions of federal border police officers, who may have contributed to the death of a Sudanese deportee in May by using restraint techniques which impeded breathing."

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<sup>11</sup> *Verfassungsschutzbericht* 1999 (<http://www.bmi.bund.de/publikationen/vsb1999>)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.amnesty.org> The report covers the period January to December 1999



## **GERMAN FAR-RIGHT CRIMES UP 60 PCT**

*Far-right offenses in Germany jumped by 59 percent last year to their highest level since the end of World War II, among them brutal attacks on foreigners and minorities that have spurred renewed action against extremists, the government said Friday. In the most-watched development, the Interior Ministry's figures showed that violent far-right crime leapt by a third — confirming a trend that has worried politicians and Jewish leaders.*

*Authorities registered 998 violent crimes with a far-right motivation last year — a jump of 34 percent from 1999 and the highest figure since 1,485 such offenses were registered in 1992. Three people were killed.*

*“The figures make clear that extreme right crime in Germany increased in 2000 not only in quantity, but also in its nature,” Interior Minister Otto Schily said. Anti-Semitic crimes surged by 69 percent to 1,378, while crimes aimed against foreigners rose 57 percent to 3,594, the ministry said. When other offenses such as displaying neo-Nazi symbols or distributing propaganda were included, the total was 15,951 — an increase of 59 percent over the previous year. That was the highest overall figure in the postwar era, the Interior Ministry said. The highest previous total was in 1997, when 11,700 offenses were registered.*

*Among the worst attacks in a year that put far-right crime at the center of attention were the beating death of a Mozambican immigrant by skinheads in the eastern city of Dessau, and the killing of a homeless man by four self-confessed far-rightists on the Baltic island of Usedom. Other incidents have ranged from an attempted arson attack on a hostel for asylum seekers to thugs shouting threats outside a Jewish couple's home.*

*The ministry said some of that increase probably was a result of increased reporting by authorities and citizens. Partial figures released over the past six months have documented the rise in far-right crime, but Friday's data were the first total for the year. “We can't say for sure how the far-right threat will develop this year,” Schily said. “But even if it decreases, that doesn't mean we can relax. The government will pursue its programs against right-wing extremism with the required toughness and resoluteness.” Schily insisted, however, that “it would be wrong to dramatize the situation,” saying German democracy was secure and that the extreme right attracts a small minority. The head of Germany's domestic intelligence service, Heinz Fromm, told German radio he is “convinced that right-wing extremism is on the rise, particularly the violent faction.” The surge in violence has prompted measures from public awareness campaigns to a government drive to outlaw the far-right National Democratic Party and a government plan to assist neo-Nazis who quit the scene. (...)*

*©Associated Press<sup>13</sup>*

*(European monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), Annual Report 1999.)*

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<sup>13</sup> This article can be found at: <http://icare.to/news>

**I**t was in Germany that we found the greatest number of initiatives aimed at tackling racist violence. This seems logical when you consider the almost daily attacks against the Jewish community, asylum seekers and coloured people that take place there.

In this context, it is impossible to make an exhaustive list of all church initiatives on racism, xenophobia and, especially, racist violence. Some of the people we contacted told us that there are thousands of projects and programmes throughout Germany! However, we are able to give a brief outline of the framework in which the various church initiatives are being carried out.

First of all, there are initiatives at different levels: national, regional and local.

At the national level, there are large-scale initiatives that are generally well covered by the media. Two perfect examples of this type of initiative (which we will describe in more detail later) are “Invite Your Neighbours” (*Lade deine Nachbarn ein*), an initiative of the Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK), and “Foreign Citizens Week” (*Woche der ausländischen Mitbürger*) organised by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). These are not programmes as such. They aim rather to encourage or support other initiatives (“Invite Your Neighbours”) or act as an umbrella for many separate activities or events (Foreign Citizens Week). It is difficult to evaluate the effect of this kind of initiative because they cover so many different things, see themselves as catalysts and have extremely broad objectives.<sup>14</sup> The fact that organisations such as ACK or EKD take on responsibility for this type of initiative poses another problem: they both have federal, rather loose and not very binding structures. They cannot therefore oblige their members to adopt particular measures. They can only make recommendations or encourage reflection that may result in concrete actions. It follows that putting things into practice at the grassroots can sometimes be problematic.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, such big organisations have the disadvantage of being a little overweight administratively and organisationally, which can make their involvement difficult.

On the other hand, there are many much more concrete initiatives at the local level, though these have a narrower focus: anti-racist seminars in schools or youth clubs; work with the police; supervision of young people who are particularly inclined to violence. The initiators of these activities are local churches or parishes or even individual pastors or chaplains. These initiatives generally have limited objectives (anti-racist work in particular schools or within the local police force) but have the advantage of dealing directly with the concrete manifestations of racism and xenophobia.

Finally, it is often difficult to say when initiatives emanate exclusively from churches, parishes or ecumenical groups, because the churches work hand in hand with other elements of German society in the fight against racism, xenophobia and racist violence. In many cases, the churches participate in or support programmes which have been initiated by another groups. Or they may work alongside official agencies or voluntary sector organisations in networks or as part of the very broad alliances that are fighting the scourge of racism in Germany.

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<sup>14</sup> The “Lade deine Nachbarn ein” (Invite Your Neighbours) project aims to “overcome xenophobia, racism and violence”.

<sup>15</sup> For example, only one of 16 regional church representatives invited by ACK attended the “Invite Your Neighbours” evaluation seminar held on 16-18 October 2000!

## “INVITE YOUR NEIGHBOURS” (*LADE DEINE NACHBARN EIN*)

You are a neighbour  
so am I  
I wanted to be your neighbour  
because I live here.  
That I live here  
I wanted to tell you  
because I am a neighbour

I look into the sky  
and dream  
that I give you my hand,  
that we drink something together,  
that I laugh with you,  
that we plant a tree together  
against fear of you and of me;  
that we bury the silence with our heartfelt chatting;  
that we throw the xenophobia  
into the deepest sea,  
and put up a sign:  
“Fishing forbidden”;  
that we look at each other  
and recognise  
that we are neighbours.

*Jean-Felix Belinga-Belinga*

“Invite Your Neighbours” is an initiative of the Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK), in co-operation with the Council of German Jews and the Council of German Muslims and is aimed at overcoming xenophobia, racism and violence. It was launched in 1999.

“Invite Your Neighbours” is not itself an anti-racist programme. It is an attempt to encourage and provoke meetings and contact between Germans and foreigners, whether they are refugees coming from regions affected by civil war, asylum seekers, foreign workers or immigrants from eastern Europe. The name of this initiative – “Invite Your Neighbours” – represents an appeal to people who may be of different origins but who share the same country, to stop ignoring each other, to talk to each other and to get to know, understand and respect each other. ACK has prepared a pack containing numerous ideas, suggestions, practical advice and background information, with a view to transforming the call to “Invite Your Neighbours” into reality. ACK has also established a foundation called “Foreigners Can Be Friends” (*Fremde werden Freunde*) which provides funds for multicultural activities. The project aims to encourage and strengthen the many other existing initiatives.

This type of initiative is not something new in Germany: others have included “Foreign Citizens Week”, “Fraternity Week”, “Open Day at the Mosque” and “Refugees Day”. The organisers of “Invite Your Neighbours” maintain that, “these activities will be necessary here in Germany for as long as people are attacked in the street or wounded in their dignity in some way just because they are different”.<sup>16</sup> It is this context of generalised racist violence and aggression in Germany that led to the launch of this initiative.

To remedy the situation, the churches and, in a more general way, all Christians, have a special responsibility and a special role to play. “The churches are among the few institutions that can make an essential contribution to a positive social climate and harmonious coexistence”.<sup>17</sup> As for the Christian religion, “it has, in various ways, identified the basic human values that are important not only for the environment and society but also for life’s spiritual dimension. The behaviour of people towards each other, their acceptance of and affection for others, their obligations towards those in need and the disadvantaged are central tenets of the Christian faith and of the relationship of Christians with God. It follows from this that, as part of their faith, the churches and all Christians have excellent opportunities for promoting peaceful coexistence between communities and people of different cultures and religions”.<sup>18</sup>

The “Invite Your Neighbours” initiative is implicitly based on the premise that racism and xenophobia are caused by unfounded fears or unjustified prejudices. In Germany, racism and xenophobia are most common in the new *Länder*, the states of the former East Germany, even though the proportion of foreigners there is less than in the rest of the country. That would tend to confirm that it is not the number of foreigners that is important, but rather that racism and xenophobia are nurtured in large part by the fears, prejudices and ignorance of people.

The logic of this approach assumes that the level of racism and xenophobia resulting only from negative perceptions should diminish if people of different origins, cultures and religions come into contact with each other. “Face-to-face contact and getting to know somebody personally promote mutual understanding and bring people closer together, and show that perceived problems of coexistence do not exist or can be easily resolved. The other person, a so-called foreigner, becomes a human being like you and me.”<sup>19</sup> So the “Invite Your Neighbours” initiative wants to promote and facilitate dialogue and contact between German residents and foreigners. However, the slogan “Invite Your Neighbours” is unfortunately not echoed by what happens in the real world. In our societies, we cannot assume that people will open their door to foreigners, as was the practice in biblical times and as it still is in some cultures.

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<sup>16</sup> “Lade deine Nachbarn ein”, leaflet.

<sup>17</sup> “Lade deine Nachbarn ein”, Materialheft 1: “Warum diese Initiative?” (booklet of materials)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> “Lade deine Nachbarn ein”, Materialheft II-Didaktische Arbeitshilfe” (teaching aids).

**The personal testimony below is evidence of this situation:**

“Recently we wanted to hand in a key to a neighbour with a Serbo–Croatian name. She asked us to come in and offered us a cup of coffee. While drinking, she told us that our short visit was something very special for her: *“I have lived here in this place with my husband for 28 years and you are the first Germans ever to enter my flat and sit on my settee”*.”<sup>20</sup>

This story is not unique. There are many people in our neighbourhood that we do not visit and of whose existence we are only dimly aware. It is precisely this situation that “Invite Your Neighbours” proposes to change.

As we have already said, the “Invite Your Neighbours” initiative aims to promote greater contact between foreigners and people who are native to the area. To that end, ACK has published two pamphlets containing examples of events that have brought people of German and foreign origin together, as well as suggestions and practical advice for organising such events.

**“There are many opportunities”**

A pamphlet entitled “There are many opportunities”, gives many examples of multicultural events, meetings and other local initiatives. It aims to show what is already being done and, in this way, inspire people or provoke new ideas.

**These are some of the many examples:**

Each Easter Monday, at the invitation of German and non–German Protestant communities, a big open–air ecumenical, multicultural fête is held at Kloster. It is an occasion for people from very different backgrounds to meet each other and to learn how to get to know each other better. Gospel music and Bible readings are on the programme but so are exotic culinary specialities, Korean drums, Greek folk dancing, German singing...

At Wolfschlügen in the summer of 1995, the women of the village organised a meeting on the theme of “My neighbour is a foreigner. What should I think about that?”. They had the idea of inviting some foreign women that they hardly knew. Each was to bring something to eat. This simple meeting took on greater significance and resulted in the organisation of a big fête in November 1995, featuring cooking from different countries. A quarter of the participants were foreign. “I would never have imagined that there was a Kosovan couple with two children, people from Bosnia and Turkey, a Cambodian family, a Tunisian family and a Chinese couple living in our village”, confided one of the organisers of the event.

“Invite Your Neighbours” also make suggestions for organising meetings and making invitations. What are the best opportunities? Sometimes, the opportunity to invite and meet other people crops up spontaneously. If that does not prove to be the case, the holidays and special days of other cultures and religions are excellent occasions for meetings and contact.

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<sup>20</sup> Example taken from “Invite Your Neighbours” leaflet.

The ACK brochure provides a calendar giving the date and describing the nature of the many special days in the cultures and religions of other people.

For example:

Mevlid commemorates the birth of the Prophet Mohammed at Mecca in 570 A.D. The date of this holiday changes each year (in 2001, it will be on 4 June). On this day, mosques are illuminated by candles and lights and people tell stories and legends about the life of the Prophet.

Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year took place this year on 30 September and 1 October. It celebrates the covenant of God with Israel. It is an occasion to look back but also to look to the future. It is customary to dip bits of apple in honey in order to have a happy new year.

Germany's national holiday is on 3 October. It commemorates German reunification. Perhaps it is a fitting occasion on which to work for a better understanding between different communities in Germany

Good neighbourliness and contact between people can often be built up by using seemingly insignificant things. Could one imagine Christmas without Christmas cards? For many Orthodox Christians, Jews and Muslims who live in Germany, there are no such cards on the occasion of their major holidays. Perhaps there is somebody in our neighbourhood who is of another religion? Would it be a good idea to send them a card giving our best wishes to our neighbours, acquaintances, colleagues and friends? For example, on the occasion of Ramadan, Pesach or Hanukkah or Orthodox feast-days.

Finally, some practical advice is given to help make meetings a success:

Do not lose sight of the give and take required by those who are doing the inviting and those who are invited. Invite people but accept other people's invitations as well!

A meeting needs preparation: for example, you need to choose a theme which is appropriate and interests everybody, and discuss openly the expectations and concerns of participants about the meeting...

It is wise to have an evaluation after the meeting, in order to improve future events.

### **How are we to evaluate "Invite Your Neighbours"?**

It seems to us that it is extremely difficult to make a detailed evaluation of the "Invite Your Neighbours" initiative. As we have emphasised, it aims to encourage and support other initiatives throughout Germany. So in one sense, it is impossible to do more than list all the projects which were begun or encouraged by the ACK initiative. Just in the province of Saxony, for example, "Invite Your Neighbours" has permitted the holding of many events and activities: weekend meeting between foreign and German women and their children, a visit to the asylum seekers' centre at Krakow by more than 200 students, a meeting and discussion with the Muslim community of Halle, numerous multicultural fairs...

In October 2000, a meeting held in Frankfurt to evaluate the results of the "Invite Your Neighbours" initiative decided to continue with it. This would tend to indicate the need for such an initiative and is surely excellent news...

## “FOREIGN CITIZENS WEEK” (WOCHE DER AUSLÄNDISCHEN MITBÜRGER)

**A** Foreign Citizens Week has been held each autumn for the last 25 years. This year, the event, which is also known as Multicultural Week, took place between 23 and 30 September. This major event is organised by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), the German Bishops’ Conference and the Metropolitan of the Greek Orthodox Church in Germany. Throughout the country, countless religious communities, refugee support groups, other initiatives relating to the situation of foreigners and foreign representatives and councils participate in the event, which was first organised in 1975.

The organisers say that the aim of the event is to, “promote coexistence and understanding between Germans and people from elsewhere, and get rid of misunderstandings, prejudices and xenophobia”.<sup>21</sup> The event aims to raise public awareness about problems of racism and xenophobia in as broad a way as possible.

This year the slogan for the week is, “human dignity is inalienable” (*Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar*). It refers directly to the climate of hate and racist violence that is prevalent in Germany. At the official inauguration of the event in Hanover, the President of the German Bishops’ Conference said he was concerned that, “racism and xenophobia have become very visible in our country, to a frightening extent”. Manfred Kock, President of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany justified the slogan “human dignity is inalienable”, by explaining that “the series of violent acts against foreigners has shaken us and continues to cause us concern”.

“Human dignity is inalienable”. This statement is contained in paragraph 1 of article 1 of the German Basic Law: “Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority”. The organisers of the “multicultural week” aim to remind the government of its responsibilities and to draw attention to the fact that, in Germany, the well-being, liberty and even the dignity of men and women are all too often flouted because they belong to a particular minority, nationality or religion.

Moreover, the concept of human dignity corresponds totally to the Christian religion’s concept of humanity. As narrated in Genesis, human beings were created in the image of God. The first human being created therefore represents all peoples and not just one particular people. On this basis, all men and women have the right to live in dignity. The depiction of the human being as being in the image of God is found in the first chapter of the Bible on the creation (Genesis 1: 26f).

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<sup>21</sup> “Woche der ausländischen Mitbürger-Interkulturelle Woche” (Foreign Citizens’ Week), “Ein Arbeitshilfe für Unterricht und ausserchulische Bildungsarbeit” ( a workbook for schools and educational work in the community).

## What exactly is “Foreign Citizens Week”?

First, we will mention the appeal launched at the beginning of the week for the regularisation of the situation of the approximately 35,000 Bosnian refugees in Germany. According to Manfred Kock, the refusal by the authorities to do so gives the impression that they are making a distinction between “useful foreigners” and “scroungers”; this rejection and exclusion can only encourage prejudice, and it certainly does not respond to the duty to respect human dignity. During the week, there is a “Refugees Day”. On this day, PRO-ASYL<sup>22</sup> has called on churches, parishes, associations, projects and individuals to write to the Federal Minister of the Interior or to the Interior Ministers of the different states, to try and persuade them to agree to guarantee the right of residency to the Bosnian refugees.

In all, 2000 events of every kind were organised in about 100 different places throughout Germany during “Foreign Citizens Week”.<sup>23</sup>

### Here are a few examples of the countless events and activities that take place during Foreign Citizens Week:<sup>24</sup>

- School readings from the book, “Racism explained to my son”, by T. Ben Jelloun.
- Courses in German for immigrant women.
- Conferences promoting dialogue between cultures and faiths or ‘discovery days’ about other cultures and religions, for example, “Open Day at the Mosque”.
- Theatre and dance performances (for example, “Other countries -- other dances”), and music (“A musical voyage round the world”)...
- “Diversity Training” workshops, aimed at teaching tolerance.
- Sporting events such as the football tournament called “Sport alliance -- Together against xenophobia”.

And many others...

How are we to evaluate the real impact of such a week when, just a few days after participating in the official inauguration of the event, Ministers spoke again of the need to strengthen border controls and restrict asylum rights?<sup>25</sup> It seems that bouquets and fine words decorate the event but that things go back to normal once it is over.<sup>26</sup> On a more optimistic note, “Foreign Citizens Week” does not expect to eliminate racism and xenophobia by waving a magic wand, but rather to raise the awareness of the broadest possible public. If these seven days contribute to raising awareness in this way, it can be said to be a success.

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<sup>22</sup> PRO-ASYL has, for many years, organised Refugees Day. It is a non-religious organisation helping refugees, but most of its income comes from the German churches (notably EKD).

<sup>23</sup> Approximate figures for the 1999 Foreign Citizens Week. The figures for 2000 are expected to be about the same.

<sup>24</sup> These examples are taken from the Berlin and Brandenburg regional programme, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Dr. Heribert Prantl, “Woche des ausländischen Mitbürger”, Materialheft 2000

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



## **EKD INTERNET ACTION AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM**

**A**fter the attack on the synagogue in Düsseldorf on 3 October 2000, Germany's national day, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) decided to show its solidarity with the German Jewish community. It also hoped to show that no anti-Semitic act can be tolerated in Germany. "When the Jewish community is attacked, the Christian churches and everybody in this country have the moral duty to make a resolute stand against anti-Semitism", declared the EKD, among others.

On its Internet site (<http://www.ekd.de/solidaritaet>), the EKD invites people to sign a letter to Paul Spiegel, President of the Council of Jews of Germany. The letter is as follows:

Dear Mr Spiegel,

We write to express our concern and abhorrence at the extreme right-wing and anti-Semitic acts that have been committed in the past days and weeks. The arson attack on the synagogue in Düsseldorf in particular awakens memories of the darkest period of German history and fills us with shame.

We also take this opportunity to assure you that in future we shall be at even greater pains to make sure that hostile acts of this nature are not tolerated in Germany. We shall do everything we can to ensure that Jews in Germany do not have to ask themselves whether it was right to re-establish Jewish communities here.

We welcome the proof of trust shown by many people of the Jewish faith in daring to live in this country at all following the horrors of the Nazi era.

Please be assured of our solidarity.

## WORK WITH THE POLICE (GRÜNE GEHEN FREMD – FREMDE SEHEN GRÜN)

We look now at an important aspect of racist violence: police abuse of foreigners. Too often in Germany, foreigners or German citizens who belong to certain ethnic minorities are victims of police harassment (for example, when the police constantly stop them and ask to see their identity card, just because they don't like the look of them), or the target of racist insults or, worse still, physical violence. In successive reports,<sup>27</sup> Amnesty International lists no less than 70 documented cases of police abuse between 1992 and 1995 and 40 between 1995 and 1997. Amnesty emphasised that it would be wrong to see these cases as only individual and isolated acts. It claims that these incidents seem to show the existence of a predisposition towards violence on the part of the police.<sup>28</sup>

Given this situation, many groups and organisations have looked into the problem of racism and xenophobia within the police. We will mention only an initiative of *AKTIONCOURAGE e.V – SOS Rassismus* called *Grüne gehen fremd – Fremde sehen grün*. It is not a church initiative but we thought its approach seemed original and interesting. First, the name of this initiative – *Grüne gehen fremd – Fremde sehen grün* – which literally means, “the men in green visit foreigners and foreigners meet the men in green”. It is all about getting the police (“the men in green”) to meet “the people from elsewhere” and vice versa. The aim is to stop the police making *a priori* assumptions and being racially prejudiced on the one hand, and, on the other, to dissipate the fear and distrust of others towards the police. The project was launched in 1996, when 10 police officers from Bonn spent five days with families of foreign origin. The week's programme included an introductory meeting, role-plays, discussions (especially on the subject of “the police and foreign citizens”) and visits to police stations and to the workplaces of the foreign hosts. A lot of time was left for discussion, to allow all the police officers and their host families to become acquainted with each other and to understand and try to appreciate each other.

*“After 20 years in the police force, it was the first time that I'd been in the home of foreigners living in Germany. It's a pity I didn't have such an experience earlier. This week is going to help me to do my job better in the future.”*

A police officer participating in the project.

*“Until this week, I really thought that all German police officers were racist!”*

An immigrant speaking at the end of the week.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> “Misshandlungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland” (1995) {Cases of mistreatment in the Federal Republic of Germany} and “Neue Fälle-altes Muster Polizeiliche Misshandlungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland” (1997) [New cases - old patterns of mistreatment by the police in Germany} (c.f. : <http://www.amnesty.de/berichte/eur23/230497.htm> )

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Witness accounts taken from “Grüne gehen fremd – Fremde sehen grün”, “AKTIONCOURAGE e.V” (<http://www.aktioncourage.org>)

## ***FEST DER BEGEGNUNG AND THE GRÜNE GEHEN FREMD – FREMDE SEHEN GRÜN PROJECT IN MAGDEBURG***

**W**e felt it important to highlight what is being done in Magdeburg for two main reasons. First, the churches are very involved in both the organisation of the “*Fest der Begegnung*”, an open day to encourage contacts between police officers and foreigners and the *Grüne gehen fremd – Fremde sehen grün* project. Second, the name Magdeburg still evokes memories of the dramatic events of May 1994.

“On Thursday 12 May, about 40 young, extreme right-wingers, armed with knives and clubs, hunted down foreigners in the town of Magdeburg in the former East Germany. The clashes left six injured including two with serious injuries, according to the police report published that evening. Towards the end of the afternoon, the young right-wing extremists, supporters of a football club, marched through part of the town making the Nazi salute and then violently attacked a group of about a dozen foreigners, whose nationality was not reported.

The extremists then went into a cafe where some of their victims had sought refuge while they waited for the arrival of the police. “They began a veritable hunt for foreigners”, declared a spokesperson. In the evening, the hooligans split up into small groups and continued their hunt in the town centre before the forces of order managed to control the situation after several hours, said the spokesperson. The police arrested about 50 hooligans and foreigners. -- (AFP.)<sup>30</sup>

The most serious thing about this sorry affair was the attitude of the police, who were completely overtaken by events. When, at last, they arrived on the scene and managed to control the situation, they treated aggressors and victims in the same way, and arrested as many foreigners as right-wing extremists! There followed a lively polemic about the way in which the police and the courts dealt with the situation. Those responsible for security in the town and in the state of Saxony-Anhalt were criticised for not being sufficiently on the alert. Especially because, as they acknowledged themselves, they had information about possible right-wing action on that very day.<sup>31</sup> As for the courts, they were criticised for not treating events with the seriousness they deserved.<sup>32</sup>

The police, as well as being the targets of massive protests by foreign communities, the churches and countless organisations, were accused of serious misdemeanour and incompetence. It was clear that a serious look at the situation was needed. The authorities took

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<sup>30</sup> Article in *Le Monde*, 14 May 1994: “Scenes of hunting foreigners in Germany”.

<sup>31</sup> *Le Monde*, 19 May 1994: “After the racist, neo-fascist demonstrations in Magdeburg and Vicenza. Germany: the return of the defenders of “Germanness”.

<sup>32</sup> “The Magdeburg Court which released all those arrested at the time of the fights for lack of evidence was strongly criticised by the President of the Republic, Richard von Weizsäcker, who considered the court’s position very difficult to understand: “About 50 hooligans are arrested and, the same evening, are released. Are they supposed to start again the next day?”, he exclaimed on Sunday evening during a televised interview”, in: “Germany, the racist incidents at Magdeburg revive the debate on the repression of extreme right wing violence”, *Le Monde* 17 May 1994

drastic measures to reorganise the police force. They decided to renew contacts between police officers and foreign citizens and, later, to create opportunities for them to meet.

The churches were able to play an indispensable intermediary role to ensure the success of this initiative. That is how the Evangelical Church of Saxony, and particularly the foreign representatives within that church,<sup>33</sup> became heavily involved.

### **Why work with the police?**

“You people who represent foreigners, you idealise them”: how often have we heard these words? Police experience of foreigners often tends to be limited to negative things: crime, arrests, offences, deportation, violence... In these circumstances, what police officer could imagine that foreigners are not only in Germany to take advantage of the generosity of the state and flout the law. How could they believe that foreigners are rather more interested in integrating peacefully into society? And which foreigner would want to get to know a police officer? The all too common opinion that foreigners are merely tolerated in Germany and that they ought to therefore keep quiet needs to be questioned. It is useful to make police officers understand the things that foreigners and refugees have lived through and to understand what their everyday life is like in Germany: their origins, the reasons why they fled their country, the difficult living conditions they endure and their fears (especially their fear of attack). In this context, contact in a positive atmosphere can lead to a better mutual understanding between foreigners and the police.”<sup>34</sup>

That is how the idea came up of organising an open day to bring police officers, foreigners and other residents of Magdeburg together. This event would not be held on just any day. It was to be held on the day that the “Hunt the Foreigner” events took place, events which made the town of Magdeburg so sadly famous. It should be said that this was not the only measure taken to strengthen links between the police and foreign citizens: the nomination of foreign community representatives in each police district was particularly important.<sup>35</sup>

In 1996 the first “open day” was organised with German and foreign citizens, on Ascension Day. This event, which is now in its fifth year, was established thanks to close co-operation between the police, the Magdeburg churches (especially the Evangelical Church of Saxony)<sup>36</sup> and many foreigners’ organisations.

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<sup>33</sup> We should mention the patient work of Cristina and Berhard Vater, pastors in charge of work with migrants in the Evangelical Church of Saxony (Ausländerbeauftragte der Evangelischen Kirche der Kirchenprovinz Sachsen)

<sup>34</sup> The “Grüne gehen fremd – Fremde sehen Grün ” project, Arbeitsstelle Eine Welt, Referat Ausländerarbeit, Die Ausländerbeauftragten : Cristina and Eberhard Vater.

<sup>35</sup> Representatives of foreign communities were appointed in each police district.

<sup>36</sup> We again stress the importance of the involvement of C and E Vater.

The programme:<sup>37</sup>

- music and dancing from various countries (African dancers and Jewish music), the police orchestra,
- culinary specialities and exotic foods,
- a circus and clowns for the children,
- a formal presentation of the different foreign communities in the town (including those from Mozambique, Guinea, Nicaragua, Kosovo),
- meetings and debates,
- sports (basketball, football and volleyball),
- presentation of police work (including an explanation of new traffic circulation rules resulting from the introduction of a cycling lane),
- religious and ecumenical services,
- a shuttle bus service to asylum seekers centres in Magdeburg.

Now in its fifth year, it has become an important event in Magdeburg's cultural and social life. But you might be asking yourself whether the "Meet the Police Day" is not falling into a routine. The 2000 event showed this is certainly not the case: the number of participants has in fact increased.

An event that allows police officers to meet ordinary citizens is certainly a good thing. But another step was taken to try and overcome inhibitions on both sides – the *Grüne gehen fremd* initiative. Before the open day, police officers visit families of foreign origin and foreign families visit police stations and the police school. This programme, which was set up by the police in co-operation with the Magdeburg churches<sup>38</sup> and many associations representing both foreigners and non-foreigners, was supported by the ACK "Invite Your Neighbours" initiative, "an initiative to overcome xenophobia, racism and violence".<sup>39</sup>

This initiative aims to open people's eyes about their prejudices, to put an end to mutual fears and to allow them to discover each other through contact in a positive atmosphere...

It has not always been easy going, especially finding volunteers amongst the foreign community to participate in the programme. The organisers systematically came up against the fear and reticence of the people they approached.

"We have come a long way. It has been a long and difficult path, says the Magdeburg chief of police, but it makes you feel good when the children recognise you in the street".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Programme for the 1999 party.

<sup>38</sup> We again stress the active role-played by C and E Vater.

<sup>39</sup> For the development of the initiative, see "Lade deine Nachbarn", pages 3-6.

## “STEPS AGAINST VIOLENCE” (*SCHRITTE GEGEN TRITTE*)

“Steps Against Violence” is an initiative aimed at fighting violence, especially racist violence, in schools.

We can never emphasise enough the role that education plays in the fight against xenophobia and racism. Schools are an especially important place for taking on this task.<sup>40</sup> After all, it is when they go to school that children generally have their first real experience of contact with other people who may be very different from them. It is therefore especially important to prevent prejudices and false perceptions taking a premature hold on children’s minds.

This point has been widely understood and the major “Schools Without Racism” (*Schule ohne Rassismus*)<sup>41</sup> project has stimulated many anti-racist initiatives in schools. “Steps Against Violence” is one such initiative and we have chosen to highlight it for several reasons. First, as we already mentioned, it is a project which aims to focus on a particular manifestation of racism and intolerance, i.e. violence. Second, the programme is notable for its originality: it uses South Africa as an example, makes systematic use of multimedia and employs an interactive methodology.

The “Steps Against Violence” project is the product of an ecumenical study process, which began in 1988 in a refugee camp near Durban in South Africa. The process was continued in Germany, where it was incorporated into the fight against racism and violence in schools. It was also felt to be useful in providing solutions to the broader problems associated with the rising tide of racism in German society as a whole.

The project is organised by a group of German and South African theologians and teachers from Kassel and Braunschweig working under the direction of the Reverend K.J. Burckhardt.<sup>42</sup> The project was piloted in 1993 at several secondary schools in Braunschweig. Since then, around 17,000 students in more than 60 schools have participated in the “Steps Against Violence” seminar.

### **The project aims to:**

- Highlight the structural causes of violence among German and South African youth and draw out the main patterns of behaviour.
- Encourage participants to reflect on their own experience of violence and on how they behaved or reacted to it.
- Show participants that running away or staying to fight are not the only attitudes that can be adopted to stop violence; develop other options, especially active non-violence based on ethical and theological arguments.

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<sup>40</sup> On this same subject, see also the “Foreigners in schools” project.

<sup>41</sup> Programme launched in the mid-1990s in several European countries (Belgium, Netherlands, France, Germany, United Kingdom).

<sup>42</sup> K.J. Burckhardt, project coordinator, is a pastor who worked for many years in South Africa, notably in the Canaan refugee camp. He is now the Regional Secretary for Mission and Ecumenism in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lower Saxony.

The project aims to attain these aims by using the successful struggle against apartheid and institutionalised violence in South Africa as a model (although the fight there is far from over).

“I was roller skating in the street when someone tripped me up. Why? I broke my leg and arm and grazed my chin and all because I am Turkish.

**I do not understand! I do not understand!”**

“Why is the world so hard? I can’t see any sense in it. They go on holiday to my country, Turkey. If everybody was like them, I would just say: “Oh no!”. In Turkey, they are foreigners, like I am here. But, they don’t get badly treated or beaten up like I do here.

**I do not understand! I do not understand!”<sup>43</sup>**

“Steps Against Violence” is a perfect example of co-operation between local communities, schools and churches.<sup>44</sup> In fact, volunteers from local churches, youth organisations and student associations, under the direction of K.J.Burckhardt, are responsible for conducting the project.

The “Steps Against Violence” seminar takes three periods (remember that school lessons are only 45 minutes long). There is also a longer option lasting between five and six periods. There should normally be no more than 30 students in each seminar, otherwise the number will be too big for participants to reap the educational benefits. At the end of the programme, participants are invited to join a follow-up course on non-violence and conflict resolution, which is delivered by professionals. The number of students choosing to take up this option testifies to the interest in the subject of violence and to the relevance of projects like “Steps Against Violence”.<sup>45</sup> Finally, it is useful to point out that the town of Braunschweig is a member of the “Peace to the City” network.

### **The dynamics of the “Steps Against Violence” seminar**

1. At the beginning, all the participants are given a badge marked either “White” or “Non-White”. They are told that each of them must sit in a particular place. The difference in their situation quickly becomes clear: the Non-Whites are confined to the smallest part of the room, while the Whites are separated by a kind of demarcation line, have much more room and are served with coffee and cakes.

2. After the seminar leaders have welcomed the students and introduced themselves, the participants fill out a short questionnaire about South Africa. They are then given some basic information highlighting the differences between the situation of Whites and Non-Whites during apartheid. They then watch a video, “*Cry Freedom*”, about the Soweto riots of 1996. This very shocking film is used to provoke a reaction from the students and as a starting point

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<sup>43</sup> Testimony taken from “Peace to the City”, Braunschweig web site, <http://bs.cyty.com/elmbbs/versteh1.htm>

<sup>44</sup> Special mention should be made of the Evangelical-Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony.

<sup>45</sup> For example, when “Steps Against Violence” was still only a pilot project, two Braunschweig schools already decided to offer the follow-up course. Attendance was very good (76 of the 250 students in one school registered for the course).

for a debate in which participants have the chance to give their impressions of the film and say how it made them feel.

3. This initial, very general information is then made more personal by the presentation of life in the Canaan refugee camp near Durban. This helps the students to identify with the people concerned.

4. The students' deepening identification with the people there is intensified through the use of role-play, in which a minimum of 12 students participate. There is a three-dimensional labyrinth representing the daily life of a refugee family in Canaan. The participants have to overcome a series of obstacles in order to find their way out of the labyrinth to a better life for their family. Afterwards, the students discuss the positive and negative aspects of their situation.

5. After watching another video showing people dealing with the situations that arise in the role-play exercise, the participants discuss the system of segregation in operation in the room where the seminar is taking place (see point 1). (It should be noted that, after the role-play, all the students, without exception and without further comment from the seminar leaders, return to the place they have been assigned at the beginning of the session!). They then watch another very important film, "*The metaphor of South Africa*" about the problem of structural violence, the way in which people instinctively adopt completely wrong behaviour models, the mechanisms of segregation... The students then try to remedy the apartheid system in the seminar room.

6. After a break, the problem of violence is then transposed to Germany and the focus is on the individuals present. The context for discussion is now Germany rather than South Africa. The participants will be encouraged to question their own experiences of violence and to think about how to solve the problem of violence.

7. Another role-play exercise then allows them to look more closely at their experiences and the solutions they have just formulated. They play out various possibilities for resolving conflicts.

8. The students watch another film showing situations similar to the ones played out in the preceding exercise ("*Tuesday: Violence on the Underground – Dienstag: Gewalt in der U-Bahn*"). The action takes place on the Frankfurt underground system on an ordinary day. A violent incident is shown several times with variations in the outcome. The students must adopt a position in relation to the different scenarios and register it on a barometer (there are three options to choose from: run away, peaceful resolution or violent response). The film also gives general advice on how to react to violent incidents.<sup>46</sup>

9. Biblical reflection on love your neighbour and on alternatives to violence: active non-violence, civil courage...

10. The seminar closes with an evaluation of the project. The students are invited to join a follow-up course on non-violence and conflict resolution.

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<sup>46</sup> c.f. : "Aktion Noteingang" "How to behave in case of attack."



### **“Jesus’ third way”<sup>47</sup>**

There are three possible reactions to evil: passiveness, violence and finally, the third way that Jesus adopted throughout his life, active non-violence. Reference to this third way can be found in a famous passage from the Bible: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles”.(Mt 5: 38–41). The principle “do not resist an evil person” is not the same as resignation or acceptance of evil. If you research the etymological origin of the verb “to oppose”, you will arrive at the Greek word “Anthistēnai” which is very close to meaning “to react in a violent way”.<sup>48</sup> Jesus sympathised with the motives of the Jewish people’s revolts against Roman occupation but did not agree with the means they employed. He discarded the options of violence and of passiveness as a response to evil. His alternative was active non-violence. Three examples are given. The first is the best-known. “If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also”. If you turn the other cheek, you are telling your aggressor, “Have another go then! Your first blow did not achieve its aim. I deny you the right to humiliate me. I am a human being like you. Your status (class, race, age...) has nothing to do with this affair. You cannot humiliate me.” Such a reaction puts the aggressor on the defensive. Against his wishes, he is in fact obliged to consider you as an equal. You have taken away his power to humiliate you.

“Steps Against Violence” is certainly an important project, but it is not the only anti-violence project in Braunschweig. Other initiatives are also trying to draw on the similarities between the problems in South Africa and those in Germany.

After students in South Africa and Braunschweig established an Internet discussion forum on the subject of violence, it was decided to hold a day of action against violence in 1998. It was called “Soweto Day”. During September 2000, Braunschweig invited a South African Professor, a specialist on the issue of reconciliation, and also a street theatre group from Johannesburg. In September, there was also a successful ecumenical conference on the subject of preventing violence, attended by at least 130 people from NGOs, schools, churches... From 14 to 17 November 2000, a consultation on urban violence was held in Boston. Its aim was to bring together all the partners in the “Peace to the City” network to develop their contacts with one another and pool their experiences in the struggle to overcome violence. Like the other cities in the network (Belfast, Rio de Janeiro, Bethlehem, Kingston, Boston...), Braunschweig was represented by several people, among them Rev. K.-J. Burckhard, the man who launched the “Steps against Violence” project. All this goes to show that the “Braunschweig model is receiving increasing attention in Germany,” he says.

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<sup>47</sup> “Der Dritte Weg Jesu” is an extract from the book “Im Angesichts des Feindes” by the theologian, W. Wink. This extract is taken from the “Steps Against Violence” brochure.

<sup>48</sup> “It is not a question of non-resistance to evil in general. This verb means to resist in the sense of react, to answer like with like”.

## FOREIGNERS IN SCHOOL (“AUSLÄNDER MACHEN SCHULE”)

This is the name of a project started in 1996 by the Regional Offices for foreigners, youth and schools (“Regionale Arbeitsstellen für Ausländerfragen, Jugendarbeit und Schule e. V.” RAA), with the support of the Ministry of Education of the state of Brandenburg..

As the project’s name suggests, people of foreign origin go round the schools in Brandenburg to meet the students and talk to them. They present their country of origin and describe their life in Germany to children in kindergartens, preparatory and primary schools, but also to older students in secondary schools, high schools and further education colleges. By telling their personal stories they are able to bring up the subject of difference and racism quite naturally. This lesson in anti-racist attitudes and cultural coexistence covers two class hours (i.e. two 45-minute periods). The classes are given by people of very different origins – Bulgaria, Chile, Nigeria, China, Togo, Sierra Leone, Peru, Mozambique..

The person who thought up this project and is today its charismatic director is 55-year old Jean-Jérôme Chico-Kaleu Muyemba, who was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire). Jean-Jérôme arrived in Germany in 1972 and has since obtained German nationality. This former high school teacher from Kinshasa has been going round the schools, working against racist and anti-foreign prejudices for more than 8 years now. *“I had the idea at the beginning of the 1990s when there was an upsurge of racist violence. Part of the problem is the terrible ignorance about foreigners in this part of Germany. I thought to myself that if we had more contacts it might help to dispel people’s fears,”* he admits.<sup>49</sup> For most pupils Jean-Jérôme is the first “black man” they have met. Some of them are surprised to discover that he speaks fluent German. *“When the children shake my hand they all turn over their palms to see if it has left a mark. They all do it!”*<sup>50</sup> he says. Since 1992 he has visited more than 1000 classes and all these visits and meetings have helped him to perfect his methods.

To make the best of the ninety minutes at his disposal and hold the children’s attention, he begins by introducing himself, so they get into the subject immediately. Jean-Jérôme then goes on to present his traditional dress, gets the children to sing a song in his own language or, if it is an older class, teaches them some words in Swahili.

“This morning the teacher is black. The apprentices in the school at Eisenhüttenstadt near Germany’s eastern border are still busy sizing up the intruder when he begins to speak: *‘My name is Jean-Jérôme Chico-Kaleu Muyemba’*. He goes to the blackboard and writes JEAN *‘like the apostle, because my father was a Protestant pastor. My first name is French because the Congo, where I come from, was a Belgian colony. CHICO, is because my father comes from Angola. It means ‘a boy’ in Portuguese. KALEU, is the most powerful god in our mythology: a god who created himself. MUYEMBA is a kind of crocodile. So when a skinhead starts playing the hardman I invite him to come to the Congo and get a crocodile from the river...If he did, of course, he would be a real skinhead.’* A first ripple of laughter goes round the class as Jean-Jérôme continues his introduction. *‘I arrived in Germany in 1972. What about you,’* he asks a girl in the front row, *‘when were you born?’ ‘1978,’* she replies. *‘Well, that means I’ve been in Germany for six years longer than you,’* he exclaims. *‘Maybe you’re really the outsider.’*<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Jean-Jérôme Chico-Kaleu Muyemba, quoted in “Au tableau noire” *Liberation*, 28-29 October 2000

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Extract from “Au tableau noir”, *Libération*, 28-29 October 2000.

The subject of discussion is never decided in advance. The topics vary depending on the age of the students and how receptive they are, but also the life experience of whoever is giving the presentation. The important thing is to get the students involved. How do they imagine Africa? How do they perceive foreigners in Germany? They are shown some drawings or statistics and asked to react freely. Their questions and reactions, whatever they may be, thus form the core of the lesson. Depending on what direction the discussion takes various themes can be tackled: crime and foreigners, the problem of refugees...

The youngest children often ask apparently simple questions that are very difficult to answer. "*Why are you black?*"<sup>52</sup> or "*Why are your hands black on the outside and white on the inside?*"<sup>53</sup> When that happens, Jean-Jérôme tries to make them see that everyone is different and that African children also wonder why people in Europe have a different colour of skin. Sometimes children ask, "*Who are you more afraid of, the lions in your country or the German skinheads?*"<sup>54</sup>

In another school Jean-Jérôme gets his audience to react by showing them a picture of a German girl hand in hand with a black boy. One 13-year old girl is scandalized: "*We Germans have to maintain the purity of our race.*" No-one in the room, not even the teacher, says anything to contradict this argument reminiscent of the blackest hours of German history....<sup>55</sup>

When a student in Potsdam stated, "*Foreigners shouldn't be here in Germany, they're a threat to our culture,*" Jean-Jérôme asked him how he defined that culture. When the boy mentioned, "*The German language and German cooking*", Jean-Jérôme replied by telling him that many words had been imported into the German language, and as for "*German cooking*" – had he ever eaten a pizza or a kebab? The boy said he had.<sup>56</sup>

These few examples show that the task is anything but easy. Jean-Jérôme reckons that 90% of the visits are worthwhile, in the other 10% of cases the presenter is unable to give his lesson and may even be subjected to invective and mistreatment. But the fact remains that ignorance about everything relating to foreigners is so widespread that these lessons are essential. Most of the school students the presenters meet think, for instance, that foreigners make up 40 to 50% of Germany's population,<sup>57</sup> and the teachers are no better informed.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Jean-Jérôme Chico-Kaleu Muyemba. *Interkulturelle Erziehung: ein Schwarzafrikaner in brandenburgischen Schulen – Eindrücke und Anregungen.*

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Source: "Black doctor challenges German racism", The Independent, 10 September 2000

<sup>56</sup> Jean-Jérôme Chico-Kaleu Muyemba. *Interkulturelle Erziehung: ein Schwarzafrikaner in brandenburgischen Schulen – Eindrücke und Anregungen.*

<sup>57</sup> In fact, 2.5% of the population in the state of Brandenburg is foreign!

<sup>58</sup> The "Foreigners in schools" project also tries to raise teachers' awareness on issues surrounding foreigners and racism.

Jean-Jérôme has not lost hope: *“I know that the children who have sung an African song with me have changed. The next time they meet a foreigner in the street, they will remember my visit rather than throwing a stone at an intruder.”*<sup>59</sup>

While the “Foreigners in schools” project has nothing to do with the churches, we felt it deserved to be mentioned. The choice of schools as the setting in which to approach the subject of difference seems very wise, as does the idea of “physically” confronting the students with a foreigner.

## WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

**A**fter this brief look at the “Steps Against Violence” and “Foreigners in schools” initiatives, we stay in the field of education and its role in preventing xenophobia, racism and the consequent violence. But this time, we mention briefly the outstanding work being done by individual pastors.

The first projects sets out to get groups of young people who may be inclined to join neo-Nazi groups involved in rock or “break dance” groups. The second highlights the courageous work of a pastor who decided to confront the racism and violence of certain self-proclaimed extreme right-wing young people head-on.

### *The integration of “difficult” young people into music and dance groups*

This project, which is located in a small town called Joachimsthal near Berlin, is not aimed at neo-Nazis or skinheads but rather at young people who might be tempted to join such groups. Young people who are attracted to extreme right-wing circles are particularly vulnerable: they often have no plan for their life and no prospects (doing badly at school, marginalisation...) and they often feel neglected (sometimes in a difficult family situation). The project, therefore, aims to give them something to do and to motivate them using music and dance. The local parish is fully involved in the project, especially through the work of its pastor, Bea Spreng (Protestant parish of Joachimsthal).

In practical terms, a music group has been formed. Concerts are organised so that that young people feel their efforts are recognised and they learn to coexist and work with other people who are sometimes different from themselves. The teacher recruited by the project is well-known in the region and exercises a certain authority over the students. The group is in close contact with other music or “break dance” groups in the Berlin-Kreuzberg region which include young people of different nationalities and different origins. There are regular concerts, workshops and even tours (notably in Austria and Croatia). As they become used to sharing positive experiences, the young people gradually get to know each other and to forget who is Turkish or who is Polish.

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<sup>59</sup> Source: “Black doctor challenges German racism”, The Independent, 10 September 2000

Sigi had his head shaved four years ago. He and his gang made no bones about what they thought about foreigners: foreigners were “parasites” who took work and homes from Germans. The gang regularly used the Hitler salute and were always ready to paint swastikas on church doors or carve them in school desks.

One evening, a Berlin “break dance” group was invited to give a show in a local church. Various nationalities were represented in the group. The show was excellent, but the fact that the “Turks” danced so well clearly did not please Sigi and his gang. After a few provocations, the inevitable fight broke out. A few days later, Sigi went to the church of his own accord to complain about how they only organised events “for foreigners”. The parish decided to accept the challenge: two “break dancers” from Dresden were given the job of working with these difficult young people. They taught them to spin on their heads, and to do all kinds of acrobatic movements and synchronised dancing. Some of them were interested and persevered. Sigi was one of them. Soon, they had put together their own dance number. Their first show took place at the school. People who had known Sigi could hardly recognise him: what had happened to the bad guy who drank so much beer and never missed the chance to act violently? Afterwards, Sigi and his friends were invited to take part in a “break dance” competition along with the Turkish “break dancers”. This was the first time they had done something together with the young Turkish people and they were enthusiastic about it.

Meanwhile, the parish had collected enough money to pay for a music teacher and to set up a group. With everybody’s help, the old sacristy was refurbished for the rehearsals. The new group was called “churchpower”, because nobody had ever heard this kind of music in the church! On one occasion, Sigi had the chance to play in the group and discovered he had a talent for singing. With the teacher’s help, he learned all the intricacies of the song and perfected it. His first concerts were a great success and he went on to perform in other concerts and competitions with other groups and individuals.

Thanks to music and dance, and especially thanks to their own efforts, Sigi and other young people were able to develop their personality, find a place in society and discover their talents so that they no longer constitute an easy prey for neo-Nazi and skinhead groups.<sup>60</sup>

There are more than 70 young people in the dance and music groups created in this way. Most of them have never returned to the racist, violent gangs they were previously involved in. As Bea Spring emphasises, “our work shows that you can change these young people, because they are ready and able to find alternatives”.

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<sup>60</sup> This example is described by Bea Spreng in the book “Lade deine Nachbarn ein”.

## *The courageous work of Pastor Christian Weber*

In this section, we reproduce an article that appeared in the 12/13 August 2000 edition of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

### **Against Passiveness, Indifference, Apathy**

#### ***How the youth pastor Christian Weber is trying to defuse conflicts between right and left-wing youths in the Niederlausitz region***

by Liane von Billerbeck.

Greifenhain/Lausitz, August – Youth pastor Christian Weber will not forget the evening a year ago, in the city centre of Cottbus. The cameras had just been switched off after a TV programme broadcast by ORB, when suddenly two young men confronted one another, one a right-winger, the other a left-winger. In the TV discussion “How far right is Brandenburg?” they had controlled themselves. Now they were squaring up, legs straddled, shoulders thrust aggressively towards the enemy. The police surrounding the scene shifted uneasily as the young men began to roll up their sleeves. What came next was a recital of injuries. Every single injury received was shouted loudly enough for everyone to hear – scars on their arms, broken teeth, slashed faces, abdomens, chests, legs, all inflicted by the other side. By now their heads were hardly more than a hand’s breadth apart.

Pastor Christian Weber stood in between them, talking to them, persuading them, aware that the best he could do would be to preserve these few centimetres that kept them apart. He managed it. After a while the two young men turned away. The policemen withdrew. “Violence is simply a part of everyday life for these boys,” he says, “It’s incredible!” Sometimes even a few centimetres can represent success. Since the 34-year old Berliner came to Greifenhain when he finished studying in 1995, he has been dealing with violence. “I had no alternative. I had to do something about it.”

In the GDR era, Weber was one of the founding members of the Initiative for “Peace and Human Rights”; he was involved in the Protestant church’s work with foreign migrants, and was already talking about Neonazis in der GDR at that time. “I have never been interested in a conformist church. This is the place where critical questions have to be asked.” He gets the warring camps to talk to one another. “You constantly have to make the right-wingers listen to what they don’t really want to hear.” He talks about foreigners and Germans, about refugees and the reasons that make people seek asylum in Germany. “I make no secret of my views”, says the young cleric. When he argues with young people about the crimes committed by the German army, that also concerns their grandparents. So when an old person has a birthday party the pastor doesn’t only admire the cake, he also ask them about the Nazi era and the war. “So that their grandchildren don’t only hear about grandpa’s adventures in Russia.”

This doesn’t make him popular. Greifenhain is in the Niederlausitz, an hour-and-a-half from Berlin, surrounded by open-cast brown-coal mines, many already worked out and filled with water. Jobs are scarce here, anyone who can find work elsewhere moves away. 320 inhabitants, a church, 13% voting for the DVU , the extreme right-wing German People’s Party – this is the village where Christian Weber has lived for five years now.

Expectations of him were high. “He’s young, he’ll do very well, he can travel around and preach, and maybe get the churches restored as well – that was what was expected.” The work with right and left-wing youths that the newspapers are writing about today is hardly noticed in the village. “It’s the same everywhere in the East. There are always only a few people who will try to do something – a pastor here, a teacher there, it’s a constant struggle against passiveness, indifference and apathy.”

Many of the young people here are already “on the edge”. When a friend of Christian Weber’s, the Potsdam photographer Torsten Lüders, started photographing young people from the Lausitz in 1998, it didn’t take him long to find a title for his project : “On the edge”. Hundreds of black-and-white

pictures, faces of people in a desolate landscape, marked by boredom, indifference and alcohol, here and there a glimmer of hope.

Lüders remembers once being out on a photo expedition with two rightwingers : “Music was blaring from their cassette player ‘We are the German master race, victory will be ours . . . Jews, Niggers, homos, to the gas oven’. They wanted to show me the open-cast mining and what it looked like. I had asked them to take me there. Then it got to such a pitch that I said, ‘Turn that shit off! What’s the matter with me? You seem to think I’m against you. What would it be like if you lot had power?’ We had had some kind of contact, we had gone out there together. Then suddenly it seems I was their political opponent. ‘We would have no other alternative, not even for you, Törsten’. “

In the summer of 1999 a group of young Israeli journalists came to Greifenhain. They had read about the “brown reality” in Brandenburg and wanted to get an idea of it for themselves. Weber had by now started the “Greifenhainer conversations”. After the discussion in the church, which only one rightwinger had attended, the Israelis found half a dozen skinheads waiting for them outside. Inside, other young people had spoken – about aggressions, about teachers who had to drive students home in their cars, about the rightwing extremists in Guben “patrolling” the streets at night like the police.

Outside the door a discussion did take place after all between the Israelis und the right-wingers, though not in the way Christian Weber had hoped. To make things worse, the youths had already drunk a fair amount of beer, and more was on hand in the boot of their car. “Who do the Jews in Israel think they are, anyway,” one of them shouted, “when they’ve stolen the land from the Palestinians”. “The Holocaust monument? Don’t make me laugh”, scoffed a second. One of the journalists asked what they thought about the six million Jews who were killed. “That never happened,” was the answer. It wasn’t possible to incinerate so many people, and that had been proven.

As the Israelis left, horrified, part of the Horst-Wessel-Lied blared after them from the recorder. Weber stayed behind, shocked at such outrageous insolence. “How can you say such things to the face of people whose grandparents were murdered in the concentration camps?” He stood there late into the night, talking, talking, talking. But he has no illusions about the effectiveness of such discussions. “With the ones that are in their twenties it’s already too late.”

### **A Tolerance Workshop**

News of the provocations spread like wildfire, and was reported in the press. Three youths were prosecuted for denying the Holocaust, two have already been sentenced. Parents have been coming to Christian Weber, not to express concern but to reproach the pastor for getting Greifenhain into the headlines. “What if our children don’t get a place in college now because Greifenhain has the reputation of being right-wing, I was asked.” Even the parish council wants no more events of this kind, no more publicity.

A defeat? No, says Weber, “It hasn’t been entirely useless all the same.” As a result of this evening a “Tolerance Workshop” has been set up in Greifenhain. What Christian Weber finds hard to take is that something had to happen before anyone in the village would stir. “Society always talks about the young people. Nobody says anything about the parents, nobody pays any attention to them. And the only thing a lot of parents bother about is whether their children come home in time. They don’t seem to care who they’re with or what they’re up to.” Yet parents, grandparents and neighbours are the ones who could do most. If a historian reported on the Holocaust, the youths would pay no attention, Weber says. “But if witnesses remember, like a woman from the next village who hasn’t forgotten the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 1938, and they say: ‘I saw the Jews being hunted down’, then they can’t just dismiss it.”

Christian Weber has invited the Israeli journalists to the “Greifenhainer conversations” again on 27 August. This time the invitation reads “Brandenburg prepares to resist the right”. The Israelis have accepted.

## PROJECT TO INTEGRATE YOUNG IMMIGRANTS IN A DISTRICT OF FÜRSTENWALDE<sup>61</sup>

The two projects “Steps against violence” and “Foreigners in schools” aim to teach German students to accept differences and persuade them of the dangers of racism and the violence that accompanies it. In the Protestant parish of Joachimsthal, the aim is to try to stop young people with a propensity to violence and intolerance from being drawn into skinhead or neo-Nazi groups. Pastor Weber, for his part, tries to discuss with the young extremists and get them “to listen to what they don’t want to hear”. Despite their different approaches, these 4 projects all focus on the latent or manifest racism and xenophobia in German society, or certain segments of it.

The ProNord district project in Fürstenwalde has a completely different approach. It focuses not on the groups imputed with racism or anti-foreign feeling but on the people who are the first to suffer from rejection and intolerance, the foreigners and immigrants themselves. The idea is that if the new arrivals are better integrated this will inevitably reduce racist tensions and anti-foreign feeling.

The project, run by Caritas with financial support from a Catholic charity, came into being when the city authorities expressed serious concern about the unacceptable behaviour of some young immigrants from the former East-bloc countries. The mayor singled out “gangs” composed exclusively of young immigrants from the East (*Aussiedlercliquen*) who, he said, hung around the streets of the city, drinking and causing trouble and sometimes turning to crime. Consultations followed between the city authorities, the police and Caritas social workers. Their conclusion was that one of the main reasons for the existence of these “clans” and their often unacceptable behaviour was the poor integration - not to say outright rejection – suffered by these young immigrants. It is worth noting that the bad behaviour of a few can lead to the whole community to which they belong being stigmatized (e.g. the fact that some asylum-seekers from the former Yugoslavia are involved in drug-trafficking means that, in the prejudices and imagination of the receiving country, the whole community of people from that region are assumed to be drug-traffickers!). This being so, helping young immigrants to integrate better so that they do not provoke the hostility of the local population represents a valuable contribution to the struggle against racism and anti-foreign prejudices.

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<sup>61</sup> This section is based on the summary of the presentation given by Annette Seiler (ProNord, a Caritas project for Brandenburg, in Fürstenwalde Nord) at the seminar held to evaluate the “Invite your neighbours” campaign, from 16-18 October 2000, in Hildesheim.



## **Fürstenwalde**

Fürstenwalde lies near the Polish border, in the east of the state of Brandenburg, part of the former East Germany. Of the town's 35,000 inhabitants, 750 are immigrants from countries of the former East bloc. Ten years after the fall of the Berlin wall and the reunification of Germany, the mood there, as in the rest of the former East Germany, is a certain nostalgia for the communist past. Accustomed to full employment under the old régime, the inhabitants today face high levels of unemployment (in Fürstenwalde, 16.1% of the population is unemployed and the proportion is much higher among the immigrants). Added to this is a high degree of hostility towards the foreigners, blamed for "stealing the jobs" that should have gone to Germans. Although the number of people who do not possess German nationality amounts to only 2.3% of the total population of Brandenburg, all the vague fears of a "foreign invasion" and the sense of helplessness before the advance of globalization are projected onto the immigrants. As a result, in the state of Brandenburg, xenophobic and racist behaviour, and even racial attacks, are tacitly tolerated by a population that feels insecure.

The district of Furstenwalde Nord is a housing development of huge buildings such as are often found in the former East Germany. Cultural and social facilities are few and far between; shops, cafés or other community centres are non-existent. Any families that have the means to do so move out of the district, making way for yet more immigrants. In short, all the disadvantaged sections of society are present there: immigrants, jobless, people on social welfare.

Problems at school, difficulty in finding a job or an apprenticeship, no prospects...such is the daily reality of the young people in this district. Many turn to alcohol, drugs or violence. Many favour a neo-Nazi or skinhead look and are likely to be attracted to the far-right, so that their anti-foreign prejudices become entrenched and they develop a greater propensity for violence.

## **Problems encountered by young immigrants from eastern countries**

Many statistics show that the young immigrants did not really choose to leave their country, and sometimes the decision was taken against their will. However, the same statistics show that most of them come to Germany with high expectations. Sadly, their hopes are soon dashed. As they stand in the never-ending queues in administrative offices trying to regularize their situation, or sit in the obligatory German lessons, they gradually realize that the reality of life in Germany is far from what they had imagined. They soon feel lost and more than a little "homesick".

These feelings are made worse by the problems of adaptation they encounter at school. The new arrivals are graded into classes on the basis of their results in their own country without taking account of their knowledge of German. They then have to follow normal courses with the German mother-tongue students. (Until the ProNord project was set up there were no supplementary German language courses alongside the regular courses.) The young immigrants also have to cope with a school system that is very different from their own (more homework, more discipline, more demanding ...). Such difficulties are demotivating, and often lead to a lack of self-confidence, resignation and withdrawal. As a result the young immigrants from the East are excluded from the normal curriculum any may be set back

several years. They are placed instead in intensive German language courses or pre-work courses, where all the other students are also immigrants, so that they have no opportunity of meeting native speakers and no chance of improving their German quickly. This is a vicious circle that it is difficult to break. Because they do not speak German well, the young immigrants are kept in a precarious social and financial position, which is psychologically undermining. This highlights how important a knowledge of the language is for integration.

Things are not helped by the fact that the young immigrants from the East are often in a conflictive family and emotional situation. In their country of origin they were about to leave the parental home, or had already done so. In Germany they have to return to it, which obviously makes for tensions. The generation conflict which is part of adolescence is aggravated by the enormous difficulties the children experience in adapting and integrating. The young immigrants may also be caught between two conflicting value systems: the traditional one based on paternal authority that prevails in the home, and the individualism advocated by German society. The patriarchal system is being undermined, however, in that the father himself is also having difficulty integrating and so loses some of his authority. Nonetheless, in response to the hostility of the outside world, families tend to become closer, so that the young immigrants may begin to feel trapped.

As a consequence of all these factors, young immigrants often go through a serious identity crisis from 6 months to 3 years after their arrival in Germany. This phase may take the form of negative behaviour or rejection – the young person cuts him/herself off, has no desire to integrate, seems passive or sometime aggressive – or it may take the form of an excessive desire to conform and deny all trace of their origins and differences. Both patterns of behaviour present similar symptoms - a sense of inferiority, helplessness, resignation or being abandoned.

Integrating is much more difficult for young people aged from 16 to 19 who may have left future prospects or a fiancée behind in their own country. Those who are younger are more able to adapt and integrate more easily.

In Fürstenwalde, very serious schooling difficulties have been observed among older adolescents, but also problems of alcohol, drugs, violence and even delinquency. In most cases, it is very difficult to reach these people and win their confidence to find out what their situation really is.

Faced with the racism and xenophobia present in German society<sup>62</sup> it is only natural that the young immigrants from the East should join together in “gangs”. These groups enable them to affirm their origins and converse in their own languages without feeling ashamed. They serve an essential social purpose for these isolated and uprooted young people, giving them the reference points they lack. Apart from their sometimes uncontrollable behaviour, these “immigrant gangs” pose a problem when the young people who belong to them have no contacts with anyone except other immigrants, which precludes their integration into society.

The ProNord project is carried by a network of several organizations: Caritas, the “Heilige Hedwig” foundation, but also the Fürstenwalde city hall and the district youth office (which

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<sup>62</sup> This is the other side of the problem: integration means that German society has to be willing to integrate the new arrivals.

provided premises and computer equipment for the office where immigrants can come for help and advice), the Nord district youth club...

The aim of the project is better integration of immigrants from the former East bloc countries in the district of Fürstenwalde Nord.<sup>63</sup> This means first and foremost working with the immigrants themselves. It is a case of meeting them, listening to them in order to understand the problems they encounter that prevent them from being integrated, but it also means reasoning with them and teaching them to respect others. Sometimes the social workers find themselves acting as intermediaries between the young people and their parents or the school. Part of this work also involves finding places where the young people can meet amongst themselves so that they do not have to hang around the streets. The second aspect of the programme consists in creating links between immigrants and the native population. This means persuading the civic institutions not to neglect the immigrant population, acting as mediators between different cultures, creating occasions for encounter and exchange, organizing communal activities...

First, contact had to be made with the young immigrants and their families; this went relatively easily and quickly. Much more time was needed before confidence was established and the young people began to come of their own accord to talk about their problems and difficulties. Various organizations in the area were also approached and informed of the project so that they could contribute - first of all the schools, in the interest of better integration of new arrivals, then the Nord district youth club with a view to organizing joint activities for local and immigrant young people. Various training centres in the town, in cooperation with the youth and social offices for the district, put up funds for German courses. Lastly, a counselling office specifically for the immigrants was opened in the area. The latter has been well-accepted; it receives young immigrants, their parents and children who come with problems of all kinds. In addition to its role of listening and advising, the office organizes sessions of vocational guidance, assists in the preparation of job applications, organizes holiday programmes....Not long ago, a drama group with children from different backgrounds was formed.

More than a year after it was launched, the ProNord project is now well-known in Fürstenwalde. The different partners engaged in it intend to continue their efforts for better integration of young immigrants.

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<sup>63</sup> In the view of the project's initiators, integration does not mean forgetting or denying one's origins. On the contrary, affirming one's origins in a positive way encourages self-confidence and hence the will to integrate.

## THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF ANHALT AND THE MURDER OF ALBERTO ADRIANO

**D**uring Whitsun weekend 2000, Alberto Adriano was battered to death in Dessau (state of Saxony-Anhalt in the former East Germany). The whole of Germany was shocked by this brutal murder.

**“(.....) The tragedy took place during the night of Saturday 10 to Sunday 11 June 2000.**

That evening, Frank and his friend Christian missed their last train home to Wolfen near Bitterfeld, once the GDR's biggest industrial polluter, now a major centre of unemployment. The two skinheads were bored and had nothing better to do with their time than drink. They had got on to the wrong path a long time ago. After his father died Frank joined a skinhead group and goes about proffering Nazi slogans. At the end of 1999 he spent two weeks in jail for having a Swastika tattooed on the back of his head and yelling Heil Hitler salutes. He left school with no qualifications, as did Christian. It came out in the inquiry that they regularly listen to skin music that chant things like “Auschwitz, Dachau, Buchenwald, we'll chill the Jews again” or “Our faces are full of hate. We love violence.”

On the station platform the two youths met Enrico Hilprecht who had also missed the train. He had done an apprenticeship as a baker but had been unemployed since he left the army. The three youths fraternized. Around midnight, having been thrown out of the station, they were wandering drunk through the streets of Dessau shouting racist slogans. In the city park they ran into Alberto Adriano, a 39-year-old Mozambican, on his way home from an evening with friends. A foreigner and what's more, black The three neo-Nazis turned aggressive. Alberto Adriano tried to reason with them. He was a worker who came to Germany in the days of the GDR, employed in the abattoirs, married to a German woman and father of three children. It made no difference. The three battered their victim savagely, yelling “Get out of our country, you negro bastard.” During the trial, Enrico Hilprecht admitted kicking the victim's head with his combat boots ten times when he was already lying on the ground.

The three youths decided to humiliate their victim still further by removing his clothes and leaving him naked except for his socks and shoes. They stole his watch and fifty marks and scattered his clothes. Then one of them dragged the body about forty yards and they all hit him again although he already seemed dead. Some passers-by alerted the police and the skinheads were arrested.<sup>64</sup> Alberto Adriano lay for three days in a coma. At the hospital the medical and nursing staff were appalled at the brutality of the attackers. The victim died of his injuries three days later.

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<sup>64</sup> The three youths quickly admitted the facts but denied intending to kill their victim. They have never expressed remorse. “I hate niggers,” one of them exclaimed when asked by the presiding judge in the court in Halle what he had against foreigners. The verdict was handed down on Wednesday 30 August 2000: the three young skinheads were sentenced to respectively to 9 years in prison for the 2 younger ones and life imprisonment for the oldest member of the gang - an exceptionally severe sentence in Germany. (source “*L'Allemagne tente d'exorciser la violence xénophobe des néo-nazis*” in Le Monde, 1 September 2000).

Speaking on behalf of the church, the president of the Evangelical Church of Anhalt immediately condemned this unspeakable murder. *“We are horrified by the brutality of this act which shows that hatred of foreigners can even go to the length of murder,”* Helge Kasshohn declared. *“Nothing and no-one can justify this barbarous act. On behalf of the Evangelical Church of Anhalt, we wish to express our solidarity with our fellow-citizens of foreign origin in the spirit of tolerance that befits the state of Anhalt. We note with shock that the circumstances of this tragedy correspond in many respects to the biblical image of the good Samaritan and we feel called by Jesus’ words to greater love of our neighbour and human kindness. We will not tolerate such xenophobia and brutality in our midst!”*<sup>65</sup> The Evangelical Church of Anhalt also called upon its members to attend the memorial service to be held at the scene of the tragedy in Dessau city park. Recalling that the victim left a wife and three small children aged from 8 years to 5 months, Helge Klasshohn asked everyone to remember the family in their prayers. Later, the Evangelical church in Dessau received countless messages from individuals and congregations asking how they could help Alberto Adriano’s widow and three children.<sup>66</sup> A pastor visited the family and is making arrangements for a memorial stone. The president of the Evangelical Church of Anhalt made a pastoral visit to the doctors and nurses who had tended the victim in the hospital.

Three days after Alberto Adriano’s death, on 16 June 2000, some 5000 people took part in a funeral procession and commemoration at the invitation of the city of Dessau and the Evangelical Church of Anhalt. Headed by citizens of foreign origin holding up a large photo of Alberto Adriano, the procession made its way to the scene of the crime. There, many public figures addressed the crowd, condemning the heinous act committed in the name of racism and intolerance. Helge Klasshohn was among those who spoke, recalling that *“Violations of the rights and dignity of the human person begin with the use of hurtful and contemptuous language towards others who think, live, speak differently from ourselves, who have different beliefs, a different colour of skin. All of us here, young and old alike, in our families, in our communal life, must be careful about how we talk about others and express dignity, tolerance and respect for their difference. This is the responsibility of each and every one.”*<sup>67</sup> The most moving words came from the representative of the foreign community in the city, Razak Minhel, who had the painful task of reading a few lines written by Alberto Adriano’s widow: *“A few minutes of utter brutality and violence have shattered our lives. We cannot take in the tragedy, we cannot begin to imagine life without Alberto.”* The speaker revealed that air tickets to Mozambique and presents for Alberto Adriano’s parents were lying ready at home - for the first time since he came to Germany he had been planning a visit to his own country. The day closed with a multi-faith religious ceremony.

In the days that followed a text was read out in all the Protestant churches in Dessau. It recalled the horrific circumstances of Alberto Adriano’s death and strongly condemned all forms of intolerance and racism. In the words of the three pastors who wrote the text, we all have a duty to examine ourselves and identify our own prejudices about foreigners and our own propensity towards xenophobia so that we can rid ourselves of them. Many priests also

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<sup>65</sup> News bulletin of the Evangelical Church of Anhalt, Press Office, No. 66/00

<sup>66</sup> The city of Dessau has opened a bank account into which donations for the family can be paid.

<sup>67</sup> News bulletin of the Evangelical Church of Anhalt, Press Office: “Address given by president Helge Klasshohn at the memorial ceremony for A. Adriano in Dessau city park”, No.71/00

preached their sermon on the subject. Today, various religious communities are continuing to talk about violence, xenophobia and right-wing extremism. In the months since these events, the Evangelical Church of Anhalt has taken part in two demonstrations against neo-Nazi groups. On 4 November 2000, about 1500 people gathered under the slogan “*Bunt statt Braun*” (Better Bright than Brown) to protest against a march by right-wing extremists (in the end banned by the authorities). Also in November, the Synod of the Evangelical Church of Anhalt dealt with the theme “foreigners in our country”. One of its recommendations was that the churches should participate in World Council of Churches’ “Decade to overcome Violence”.

Lastly, a multicultural festival is planned for Whit Monday (4 June 2001) to commemorate Alberto Adriano’s death. It will be organized by the churches, the city of Dessau, the police and many associations and will take place in the city park, at the place where Alberto Adriano tragically lost his life a year ago. It will be marked by an ecumenical religious ceremony involving representatives of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths. If this event can help to make the city of Dessau more open and tolerant, then Alberto Adriano’s brutal death will not have been entirely in vain....

## **SOME OTHER INITIATIVES BY THE CHURCHES**

**R**acism, xenophobia and racist violence do not often constitute a separate field of action for the churches, but they are often confronted by these problems and respond to them in an appropriate manner or on an ad hoc basis. For example, the churches may sometimes find themselves recording evidence of racist violence when approached by victims of such abuse. Or the subject of racist violence and racism may arise in the course of work to help and support refugees or asylum seekers.

We mention a few initiatives by the churches, which show that churches and ecumenical groups often contribute to anti-racist struggles on a routine and daily basis rather than within the framework of specific anti-racist and anti-violence programmes.

### *German Protestant Women’s Federation*

The fight against racism, xenophobia and racist violence is not a priority as such for the **German Protestant Women’s Federation**. However, the Federation comes up against the problems of racism and racist violence in the course of its work in the field of prostitution and the trafficking of women, or through the help it gives to refugees and its occasional support for the victims of racist abuse. The Federation gets involved, on an ad hoc basis, in supporting people threatened by deportation or supports them when they go on hunger strike as a last hope of halting the “deportation machine”. It also, occasionally, calls men and women politicians or public figures to account for their racist and tendentious statements.

### **“Racist statements by politicians**

“They have taken you at your word”, accused the left-wing alternative daily newspaper *Tageszeitung* on Saturday 26 August. The newspaper printed comments made by democratic party politicians which serve to “encourage the extreme right-wing aggressors”.

During the Summer of 1997, Gerhard Schröder declared, “*we should not be so afraid of the foreign criminals we catch. For anybody who abuses our hospitality, there is only one solution, get them out and quick*”.

In November 1998, Otto Schilly claimed, “*we have gone beyond the limit of our capacity to welcome new immigrants to Germany*”.

Two months later, the Christian Democrat Minister of the Interior in Berlin, Jörg Schönbohm, said, “*the period of friendship with our guests is coming to an end*”.

In June 2000, Bavaria’s Christian Social Minister of the Interior declared, “*we need fewer foreigners who use us and more foreigners we can use*”<sup>68</sup>

### *The Protestant church in the Province of Saxony*<sup>69</sup>

also finds itself dealing with asylum or racism issues as they arise.

Following the suicide of Zhu Zhe Gun, a 43-year-old Chinese man awaiting deportation in the Volkstedt detention centre (State of Saxony-Anhalt) on 2 June 1994, 28 Christians living in Nuremberg (Bavaria) decided to collect some money to have an obituary published in the press. It was by this means that members of the Protestant Church of Saxony found out about the tragic destiny of this Chinese man who preferred to end his own life rather than be expelled. Deeply moved by this incident, they decided to visit people detained in the Volkstedt centre and appointed a social worker (of African origin) for the centre. This then led to the idea of making Zhu Zhe Gun’s fate the subject of a requiem. This was mounted with the help of a well-known composer from Dresden. Entitled “Farewell to Zhu Zhe Gun”, the requiem has been performed on many occasions in Nuremberg, Stuttgart, Berlin, Magdeburg and Erfurt, amongst others. It has been well-received by the public who always find it very moving.

Last year, as part of “Foreign Citizens Week”, Bishop Axel Noack personally visited the detention centre for asylum seekers in Volkstedt in an attempt to draw attention to the situation of people awaiting deportation. Going from cell to cell, the Bishop asked detainees about their living conditions and their grievances as well as their hopes with regard to the regularisation of their situation.

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<sup>68</sup> This extract is taken from an article published by Le Monde, 1 September 2000, about the despicable murder of the father of a Mozambican family by three neo-Nazis on the night of 10-11 June 2000 in Dessau.

<sup>69</sup> This is only one example, there are many others.

Support can also take the form of interceding with the competent authorities on behalf of individuals, as in the case described in this letter of 13 November 1998 to Thuringia's Minister of the Interior.

Dear Minister Dewes,

The Synod has learned of the dramatic situation of Alexander Chernojuciov. On 4 November, after four weeks on hunger strike, he was admitted to the Naumburg/Saale detention centre's clinic.

The Synod is deeply troubled by this news given that many detainees in this centre have already taken their own lives in order to escape deportation.

We therefore ask you to do everything in your power to expedite the case of Alexander Chernojuciov in the most humane possible way."

### **SOME EXAMPLES OF ALLIANCES AND ACTIVITIES IN WHICH THE CHURCHES WORK TOGETHER WITH OTHER OFFICIAL AGENCIES AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS**

The fight against racism and xenophobia in Germany is very often the work of many organisations rather than any single one. The churches sometimes join these networks or participate in their initiatives, though they may not necessarily have been involved in setting them up. Can we say they are church initiatives? Perhaps not. Nevertheless, it seemed important to mention them because it is a rather widespread practice.

#### *Alliance for Tolerance and Civic Courage Against Violence and Xenophobia (Bündnis Für Toleranz und Zivilcourage – Gegen Gewalt und Fremdenfeindlichkeit)*

The government of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) initiated this alliance in August 2000. The aim is to show that the region has a tradition of tolerance and will not tolerate attacks, insults or discrimination against human beings. The Alliance calls on all citizens to reject racism, xenophobia and racist violence. This initiative aims to act as a catalyst and to appeal to everybody in towns and villages, factories and workplaces, churches and schools, the media and cultural circles, sporting associations and clubs to speak out and take practical action against the scourge of racism.

The Evangelical Church in the Rhineland (EkiR) is a member of this alliance for tolerance and against racism.

The North Rhine-Westphalia government, through its Minister of the Interior, has released 2.1 million marks to finance projects fighting against right-wing extremism (one mark for each of the state's inhabitants. "The police and the Courts cannot break the spiral of violence on their own, they must be able to count on a broad network of efforts to combat racism and xenophobia", said Fritz Behrens, Minister of the Interior.



What should an individual do when he or she witnesses racist abuse on a bus? How should we react if someone in a cafe makes pro-Nazi comments? Most people are deeply shocked and revolted by the ideas and actions of the extreme right, but don't know how to react appropriately. That is why the NRW government has published advice on the Internet.<sup>70</sup>

### **Show your civic courage**

Racist violence or attacks can happen at any time – at school, at work, in the street... When people are faced with such a situation, many choose to ignore it or to run away. However, they do not realise that such an attitude only encourages the aggressors.

#### **What to do?**

On the train or on the bus:

When someone is badly treated or attacked, passengers are usually shocked and do not know how to react. Here is what you can do:

- Alert the driver and ask him/her to call the police. You should know that he/she has an obligation to do that.
- If you are too far from the driver to alert him or her, ask the passengers seated at the front to do so: "the driver must call the police".
- Ask other passengers present at a racist attack to act as witnesses. It might seem unimportant but the aggressors may feel that it undermines their position. They would feel confident if nobody dared to react.
- After the police have been alerted, ask for the doors to be closed so that the aggressors cannot escape.

*"This advice is intended to show how to react. If we are going to call on citizens to be courageous in the face of extreme right-wing violence we also have to help them deal with delicate situations",* declared Minister Fritz Behrens.

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<sup>70</sup> <http://www.nrwgegenrechts.de>

## SKINHEADS BEATEN OFF

### Court sequel after housewives and a taxi driver help Turkish boy

By Ingrid Mueller-Muench

Cologne – A court trying six skinheads on charges of aggravated assault heard how two sturdy middle-aged housewives came to the aid of a Turkish boy as other people stood by and watched him being beaten up.

The skinheads, aged between 18 and 23, who had been clad in their trademark padded “bomber jackets” and heavy boots, were said to have been travelling on the number 105 tram in the Ruhr city of Essen on March 6 when they saw a Congolese school pupil, Janick.

The six, some with an already impressive list of convictions, began to abuse Janick. On the second day of the trial, Janick, tall and wearing a red baseball cap, did admit an allegation that at this point he responded to the abuse with an obscene remark about one of the skinhead’s mother.

But whatever the truth, all hell then broke loose. The skinheads raced through the tram to get to Janick and attacked him. Another black person on the tram tried to block their way but no one else, including the tram driver, reacted.

Until, that is, Janick’s 15-year-old Turkish friend joined in the skirmish to try and stop it and was himself hit. Janick was able to get out at the next stop and he ran away. But the Turkish boy remained on the tram. He then got off with the intention of travelling further by bus. The skinheads gave chase.

The court was told that when they located him at the bus stop they yelled out: “There he is, the ‘kanaka’.” They attacked him and drove him across the street, beating and kicking him as they did.

A housewife, identified only as Eva-Maria H. – in line with German custom – watched the attack and could at first not believe that nobody waiting at the bus stop did anything to stop the affray. She stormed across to the melee and called on them to stop. Her sister, Ilona T., quickly followed and used her broad back to protect the victim.

The skinheads continued to kick and punch the boy, the court heard. Eva-Maria H. said all she could see was feet and fists flying.

The Turkish boy went to the ground and lost consciousness. He told the court that when he came to he saw the skinheads kicking him.

A 21-year-old witness who watched the beating from a safe distance told how she heard the skinheads abuse Eva-Maria H. as a “German slut”. That however did not deter Eva-Maria from trying to protect the boy.

It was only after a taxi driver arrived and took one of the skinheads by the scruff of the neck that the attack ended. As the skinheads departed one called to the boy on the ground: “If I see your black nigger friend, he’ll burn like the Ku Klux Klan does it.” The judge, on the second day of the trial, thanked both women for their intervention. The case continues.

© [Frankfurter Rundschau](#)<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> These articles can be found on <http://icare.to/news>

## *Demonstration in Berlin against Racism and Anti-Semitism, 9 November 2000*

On Thursday 9 November, more than 100,000 people answered the call of politicians, trade unions, churches and other organisations and marched from the Berlin synagogue in Oranienstrasse to the Brandenburg Gate.

At the head of the demonstration, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder marched hand in hand with his wife, accompanied by a considerable number of his ministers, including Joschka Fischer, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Otto Schilly, Minister of the Interior, and numerous political, religious, trade union and other leaders. Many celebrities were also present, including the tennis champions Boris Becker and Steffi Graf and the winner of the Nobel prize for literature, Günter Grass.

The idea of the Berlin demonstration came up at the beginning of October after neo-Nazis threw Molotov cocktails at the Düsseldorf synagogue on the night of 3 October, the German national holiday. The next day, Chancellor Schröder appealed to all “*honest people to react*”. The attack was part of a wave of racist and anti-Semitic violence that has been sweeping Germany for several months. Political leaders had reacted strongly to this wave of extreme right-wing violence, particularly after the Düsseldorf bomb attack (previously, a dozen people had been injured in July, including seven Jews from the former USSR), but the public at large had not reacted in a similar way until the Berlin demonstration.

The choice of date was symbolic: 9 November marks the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and also that of the “*Kristallnacht*” in 1938, when German Jews were the victims of an infamous *pogrom*.

## **THE “EMERGENCY ENTRANCE” CAMPAIGN (*AKTION NOTEINGANG*) AND “COTTBUS REFUGE” (*COTTBUSER ZUFLUCHT*)**

**T**hese two initiatives represent very concrete and direct measures aimed at combating racist violence. That is why we felt it appropriate to highlight them even though they are not church initiatives. Although the churches are not the instigators of these initiatives, they are actively involved in them. Many churches or ecumenical groups have placed the campaign sign on their door or have indicated their interest in doing so. Church involvement in this initiative varies from town to town. In certain places, religious associations of young people are helping to approach shop-owners or individual residents to ask them to put the “Emergency Entrance” sign on their door. In other places, the Churches are much less involved or take no part whatsoever.

“Emergency Entrance” and “Cottbus Refuge” have different names but are almost identical initiatives. “Emergency Entrance” pre-dates the Cottbus project, which is the practical application of “Emergency Entrance” in the town of Cottbus. *Cottbuser Zuflucht* was only launched in October 2000 on the initiative of the “Wake up Cottbus!” (*Cottbuser Aufbruch*)

apolitical alliance.<sup>72</sup> As it is similar to “Emergency Entrance”, we will limit ourselves to describing the latter.

### “Emergency Entrance” (*Aktion Noteingang*)

This initiative is more or less described by its name. The German word *Noteingang* literally means “Emergency Entrance”. It is a play on words, because the expression *Noteingang* does not really exist. It is the “opposite” of *Notausgang* which means “emergency exit”. Luminous *Notausgang* signs are found in all public places and indicate the route by which to leave the building quickly in case of danger. The “Emergency Entrance” sign indicates to potential victims of attacks that they can seek refuge in that place.

The initiative was launched by a group of young people in Bernau at the end of 1998.

In the afternoon of 28 July 1998, four members of an extreme right wing group were roaming the streets of Bernau, insulting construction workers. They attacked and injured a Gambian man and another Bernau resident whom they mistook for a Russian. Scarcely a month later, a Vietnamese man was attacked in the same town of Bernau: two men held him down while a third hit him with a club. The victim suffered numerous cuts and concussion.

Racist attacks on two immigrants, one from Gambia and one from Vietnam, in the summer of 1998, provoked local people into action.

Faced with this intolerable violence, many people felt at a loss and powerless, not knowing how to react. This could have been interpreted by the aggressors as implicit support for their action. Meanwhile, many men and women were living in fear of attack because they were different from native Germans. They felt isolated and left to themselves. It was in this climate that the “Emergency Entrance” idea was born.

#### **The aim was to:**

- Call attention to racist attacks and to the large number of such attacks that take place.
- Clearly express opposition to and disgust with all violence against people who are different.
- Show solidarity with the actual or potential victims of such attacks.
- Ideally, prevent the attacks happening by providing a refuge for those under attack.
- Start a public debate about the measures required to fight the gangrene of the extreme right.

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<sup>72</sup> “Berliner Morgenpost”, 11 October 2000 : “Aktion ‘Cottbuser Zuflucht’ gegen Rechts”. (“Cottbus Refuge” project against right-wing extremism)

## What exactly is the “Emergency Entrance” campaign?

Shop owners, service station managers, cultural and social organisations and other institutions are approached and told about the reasons for the “Emergency Entrance” campaign, its aims and how it works in practice. They are given a written explanation of the campaign, an “Emergency Entrance” sign, a list of useful telephone numbers, advice on how to react in the event of violence and finally, they are asked to fill out a questionnaire.

The most important thing is the sign. It is a yellow and black sign with “Emergency Entrance” on it. It also says, “*We offer you protection against fascist and racist attacks!*”, in several languages. To participate in the initiative you therefore place the sign on the door of your shop, church, municipal library or house... People who might come under attack or be threatened will know that they can find refuge in the buildings where this sign is displayed. Those who agree to place the sign on their door therefore have the duty to offer protection to anybody escaping from attack, to wait until the danger has gone and, if necessary, to call the police. This is why participants are provided with a list of useful telephone numbers: the list includes numbers for the police and for organisations that specialise in providing support for the victims of attacks, especially racist attacks.<sup>73</sup>

### How to react in case of an attack?

In addition to the sign, participants are provided with some advice:

1. Be prepared! Be personally prepared for threatening or aggressive situations. Rehearse how you will react, either on your own or together with other people.
2. Stay calm! Do not make sudden movements, the aggressors may feel threatened and react in an even more violent way.
3. Do something! Instead of just witnessing the incident, show you are bothered about what is happening: taking a step forward, making a short statement or some similar act may have an effect on the situation.
4. Do not take on the role of victim! That could make the aggressors feel that they are in charge of the situation. It is up to you to take the initiative.
5. Stay in contact (visual, hearing...) with the aggressors! For example, listen to what the aggressors say. This will allow you to determine what would be an appropriate reply.
6. Avoid making threats and insults! Do not make definitive judgements about the aggressors. Criticise their behaviour but avoid making it personal.
7. Ask for help! Address people individually, not collectively. Many people are ready to act if someone else takes the first step and addresses them directly.
8. Avoid any bodily contact, if possible! When you go to the aid of someone, do not grab hold of the aggressor. Generally speaking, physical contact should be avoided as it may provoke a violent response. Ideally, only make physical contact with the victim, holding them to protect them, for example.
9. Minimise the risk! In very dangerous situations, do not expose yourself needlessly. Call the police as quickly as possible. Be ready to say what you have seen.

<sup>73</sup> Notably, “Opferperspective”, an organisation based in Brandenburg that offers support and advice to the victims of right wing violence.

The main aim of “Emergency Entrance” is to protect the victims of attacks. However, we have been unable to find a single documented case of a victim trying to escape from their aggressor by knocking on a door bearing the “Emergency Entrance” sign. This does not mean to say that it will never happen. But it should be noted that this is not the campaign’s only aim. “Emergency Entrance” does not only aim to encourage individuals to show their civic courage. It also aims to fight racism by generating a debate in society at large.

In the current situation, many immigrants, asylum seekers and coloured people live in fear of the extreme right. They feel isolated and left to themselves if they are attacked. But when they see the “Emergency Entrance” sign, they will understand that they are not alone and they will feel safer.

Many Germans are indignant and sickened by the repeated racist attacks but they don’t know how to begin to react in practice. They too feel powerless and isolated. The “Emergency Entrance” campaign provides them with a way of clearly expressing their disapproval of extreme right-wing group activities and also their support for actual or potential victims. It may also give them the opportunity to show their civic courage by opening their door to a victim.

Finally, putting the “Emergency Entrance” sign on their door is to send a message to neo-Nazis, skin-heads, and extremists and aggressors of all kinds that their behaviour and activities will not be tolerated. On the contrary, they can clearly see that if they are tempted to attack anybody, their victim can find shelter in these places and the police will definitely be called to the scene.

### **How is the “Emergency Entrance” campaign to be evaluated?**

During 1999, 14 towns joined the campaign (Angermünde, Bad Freienwald, Bernau, Eberswald, Frankfurt/Oder, Fürstenwald, Kyritz, Neuruppin, Potsdam, Schwedt, Strausberg...). In 2000, other towns decided to take part as well (notably Belzig<sup>74</sup> and Potsdam<sup>75</sup>). We are unable to provide an exact number of places where one can find these yellow and black signs. Our interim evaluation of this initiative is rather positive but many people regret that the campaign has not been more widely adhered to. Despite their efforts during 1999, the groups of young people engaged in the campaign could only find 200 shops and public institutions willing to put the “Emergency Entrance” sign on their door. Only a quarter of the 900 people approached decided to participate fully in the initiative. It should be noted that about 450 people agreed to fill in a questionnaire, in which they explained, for example, that they did not want to put the sign on their door because they were afraid that they, in turn, would become victims.<sup>76</sup> The questionnaire is distributed to each participant as a way of giving people the opportunity of familiarising themselves with the campaign even if they are not willing to become fully involved (by fixing the sign on the door of their house or

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<sup>74</sup> C.f. “Berliner Zeitung”, 14 September 2000 : “ ‘ Aktion Noteingang ’ jetzt auch in Belzig”. (Belzig joins the “Emergency Entrance” project)

<sup>75</sup> After pressure from many of its inhabitants, the town of Potsdam decided to distribute the “Emergency Entrance” signs. In order to deal with nocturnal attacks, the town is thinking about approaching establishments that are open till late at night, such as restaurants (c.f. “Die Welt”, 12 August 2000, “Potsdam sucht Wege für nächtliche *Noteingänge*”)

<sup>76</sup> Figures for 1999 taken from “Ein Jahr Aktion Noteingang :Erfahrungen eines antirassistischen Jugendbündnisses”.

shop... with all the risks it might entail). The questionnaire allows the people approached to explain in what circumstances they would open their door and to whom, and to explain why they have decided to put the sign up or not, as the case may be. Humboldt University has analysed the completed questionnaires.

**Here are some of the main points emerging from the analysis of the questionnaires:<sup>77</sup>**

83 per cent of those who filled in the questionnaire replied “yes” to the question, “Do you think that the “Emergency Entrance” campaign is positive; 9 per cent said “no” and eight percent said they did not know.

“I would help the victims of racist or fascist attacks...”

- never: 1.4%
- probably not: 2.5%
- perhaps: 15.0%
- probably: 44.1%
- always: 37.0%

It is not possible to draw up a balance sheet by simply counting the number of yellow and black signs fixed to the doors of buildings or the number of towns participating in the “Emergency Entrance” campaign. That would be too simplistic an approach, given that this initiative does not only aim to protect the victims of racist and fascist attacks. The campaign aspires to ease the climate of fear and the general feeling of powerlessness people experience faced with the activities of the extreme right.

“A lot of people were afraid. They were afraid of losing their clients, afraid of vandalism... However, the campaign has been a success in Schwedt, a town very much associated with skinheads. For the first time, a group of young people who do not belong to the extreme right have taken centre stage”.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

## ANTI-RACIST INITIATIVE (ANTIRASSISTISCHE INITIATIVE E.V – ARI)

Anti-Racist Initiative (ARI) was set up as a non-profit association in 1989. That same year, inspired by work in the Netherlands, it set up Germany's first anti-racist advice line. ARI aims to provide an independent source of support (the organisation does not depend on any official sources for its income<sup>78</sup>) for victims of discrimination or racist violence and for anybody who wants to get involved in the fight against racism and discrimination. In 1991, the anti-fascist journal ZAG was founded. ARI is very much involved in this initiative.

We should emphasise from the start that ARI is not an ecumenical or religious organisation. However, we chose to write about its work in detail for several reasons. First, it is one of the few organisations that deals specifically with racial violence.<sup>79</sup> Second, its approach seems to be the most realistic. ARI tells it like it is; it has no time for naïve optimism. It stands resolutely at the side of victims and does not really believe in the efficacy of awareness raising or education in the fight against racism and xenophobia. It believes that the problem is not caused only by individuals, but rather by government policies that aim to discourage immigration by all possible means and that tend to criminalize refugees and asylum seekers. They believe that the most important thing to do is to denounce and combat these policies. Finally, ARI is, in fact, supported by the churches. It has already received contributions from the WCC's Special Fund to Combat Racism and is requesting more support to finance other activities. The German churches support it in this move.<sup>80</sup>

Several circumstances led to the establishment of ARI. First, it was felt there was a need for an organisation that could provide advice and support to victims of racial discrimination and violence. In a broader way, the aim was to provoke a widespread debate on the issue of racism in Germany.

ARI has focused particularly on the issue of "institutional racism": the links between "institutional racism" and individual racist acts, and how to combat this form of racism. ARI also aims to start a political discussion on the question of asylum: deportation, granting residence rights etc. ARI's motives are both political and moral: it aims to denounce violence and discrimination and obtain full rights for all people in Germany. Its overall objective is to create an open and tolerant society.

ARI's work can be sub-divided into three areas. It provides support for victims of discrimination or racist violence; denounces police abuse; and fights for the granting of rights to asylum seekers and against their deportation.

The first element of ARI's **support system for the victims of discrimination and racist violence**, is the anti-racist advice line. It is through the advice line that victims of discrimination or racist violence can contact ARI and give details of their case. ARI can then provide support. Measures vary according to the circumstances and the wishes of the victim. For example, ARI can help a family suffering daily threats or racist violence to find a new place to live.

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<sup>78</sup> ARI members have other jobs or study and work for ARI on a voluntary basis.

<sup>79</sup> An ARI member was himself attacked at a bus stop in Berlin because of the colour of his skin.

<sup>80</sup> Notably, the Berlin Brandenburg Regional Ecumenical Council, which recommended ARI to the WCC.



On 13 August 1999, Mr B. contacted ARI and asked for help in relation to problems at his home. The family B, a couple with four children, refugees from the Congo, were living in a block of flats that, unfortunately, was also a meeting place for notorious racists. The leader of the racists was none other than the next door neighbour of family B. The night before his visit to ARI, Mr B. had been attacked and savagely beaten, as a consequence of which he had to have medical treatment. The racist had threatened to “finish the family off” if they had not moved out by 16 August. This tragic event was only the latest in a series of incidents in which the racists intimidated and persecuted the family. In April, someone had painted a swastika on the door of their flat. Mr B. had reported all these incidents to the police. But after examining his case, the police only advised Mr B. to contact an anti-racist organisation for help in finding a new flat!

ARI says it is quite remarkable, but symptomatic, that the extremists’ ultimatum should be completely consistent with government policy and Berlin’s intransigent implementation of that policy. The police’s attitude confirms this observation: in effect, they refused to guarantee the safety of all the population without regard to their origin, income or race, and shifted responsibility to an anti-racist group. The police are therefore an accomplice of the racist extremists who spend their time hunting down refugees and immigrants in Germany.

The first step taken by ARI was to contact the official in charge of foreigners for that district. He immediately observed that the asylum laws did not allow refugees or asylum seekers to change their address. Therefore, no legal solution was possible. So ARI decided to do some political lobbying on this case.

Finally, after many steps had been taken, family B was able to move home. At first, Mr B. showed interest in publicising his story, but he broke off all contact with ARI once he felt he was safe.

In other cases, ARI helps victims of racial discrimination or violence to obtain redress, which can include taking cases to court. If the victim so desires, ARI may also seek to publicise cases in the media.

On 18 September 1998, at Königswusterhausen, after being attacked and wounded by three men, William Zombou was refused help by taxi drivers who were present at the scene. William decided to seek ARI’s help in taking the drivers to Court for “non assistance of a person in danger”. In addition to ensuring the essential publicity, ARI helped Mr Zombou find a lawyer who was willing to take the case on. An other organisation in the Brandenburg region also assisted. When the case was first heard, the judge dismissed the case. The court accepted the arguments put forward by the taxi drivers and decided that Mr. Zombou had not been in a dangerous situation! However, on appeal, the decision was reversed: this was the first time that witnesses to an act of racist violence had been found guilty of not having helped a person in danger.

ARI is not always so successful. In many cases, the victims of racist incidents do not want their cases made public for fear of being recognised and persecuted again. Once they have obtained redress or found a new safer situation (as in the case of family B.), they decide not to get involved in publicising what happened to them.

It is often the case that victims of racist attacks abandon any attempt to obtain redress or justice, whether through fear of reprisals or because they don't have the means to pay for legal action. ARI is limited by its lack of resources (financial and human) and cannot guarantee systematic legal support.

Moreover, with a few exceptions, the verdicts in cases of racist discrimination or violence are very disappointing in relation to the amount of work put in. On the basis of its experience in this area, ARI would like to launch a discussion about institutional racism in the German legal system. Why shouldn't all men and women, without distinction of social status, income or race, be equal in the eyes of the law?

The issue of **police abuse** is even more difficult to deal with. The victims of such abuse are generally not very inclined to complain against the officers or take legal action. If a case does go to Court, the outcome is, frankly, uncertain. Strangely, the word of a police officer, the official representative of the state, tends to be believed more than that of a refugee or asylum seeker. Moreover, when someone is ill-treated by a police officer, it is often in the presence of other police officers. In these cases, the witnesses, whether through solidarity or for other reasons, are always going to take the side of their colleague, even if that colleague has committed a serious offence. If a number of officers together beat somebody up, they will cover for each other. As if that were not enough, the police are legally authorised to use violence while on duty, especially if the suspects will not comply with what they have been asked to do. But it is not easy to make a clear distinction between the violence necessary to break the resistance of a suspect and the abuse of violence; police officers are quick to allege that victims have refused to co-operate and that is why the use of violence was necessary.

It is revealing that the victims of police abuse are more likely to be found guilty, on the grounds that they have resisted arrest!

In May 1996, a police officer accompanied by a female colleague knocked on Mrs H.'s door. They had a warrant for the arrest of her cousin for non-payment of a fine. The sum in question was 1800 DM. The cousin, who was in Mrs H's flat, suggested she pay the fine. But, as she did not have enough money in the house, she asked the police officers to accompany her to a cash point machine. Instead, the two officers asked to see Mrs H's identity papers. When she refused to comply, the female police officer attempted to get access to the bedroom. Mrs H. tried to obstruct her but the other police officer grabbed her by the throat. The female police officer returned from the bedroom holding Mrs H's handbag. Mrs H. wanted to take out the identity documents from the handbag herself but the officers grabbed the hand holding the bag, pinned her arms behind her back and forced her to the ground, where she was kicked in the stomach. The female police officer only let Mrs H. go when she went on to arrest her cousin.

Mrs H. had to be hospitalised because of severe pains in her stomach. The doctors diagnosed a traumatism of the stomach and bruises to the throat caused by strangulation.

On leaving hospital the next day, Mrs H had. to bail her cousin out of jail. To cap it all, she had the disagreeable surprise of learning that she would have to appear in court on charges of resisting a police officer and refusing to cooperate with the police.

With regard to police abuse in general, ARI does not believe that the violence employed is either unintentional or the consequence of the prejudices of individual members of the police

towards foreigners. On the contrary, it feels that the violence is a logical consequence of the fact that the police force has the duty to implement government policies. It therefore considers it hypocritical to imagine that the problem can be solved by simply holding anti-racist seminars for police officers.

In recent years, the kind of violence which ARI has dealt with most often has undoubtedly been violence related to the **detention and deportation of illegal immigrants**. Either these people suffer ill-treatment in the detention centres where they are interned, because they take action to oppose their deportation (attempts to escape, hunger strike...). Or they are the victims of violence by police personnel during their deportation. ARI tries to visit interned immigrants, support “illegal” immigrants in their efforts to obtain their freedom and regularise their situation, denounce forced deportations and raise awareness among the public about deportations.

The death of d’Aamir Ageeb, who lost his life while being deported, was not inevitable! Aamir Ageeb was escorted by three police officers to Frankfurt am Main airport on the evening of 28 May, to be put on a Lufthansa flight from Frankfurt to Cairo and then on to Khartoum. Before departure Aamir Ageeb’s arms and legs were reportedly bound by the police officers and a helmet placed on his head when he resisted deportation. After he was placed in a seat by the police officers, he allegedly continued to struggle. The police officers are then reported to have forced the detainee’s head between his knees and kept him in this position until the aeroplane had taken off. After take-off Aamir Ageeb stopped struggling and was pulled upright by the police officers. When the helmet was removed from his head the police officers noticed that he had stopped breathing. Several doctors on the aeroplane attempted in vain to revive him.<sup>81</sup>

“The profound sadness” expressed by the authorities appears cynical if one looks at the measures habitually taken to deport human beings. Measures such as fastening a person to his seat using handcuffs, using helmets<sup>82</sup>, holding a cushion or sticking tape across the mouth to prevent the person shouting, and punching and kicking are the “normal” measures taken during deportations.

Unfortunately, this tragic event was not the only one of its kind. During the period 1993 to 2000:<sup>83</sup>

- 92 people committed suicide to avoid impending deportation or died trying to escape deportation; of these, 45 died in the detentions centres.
- 5 refugees died during deportation. 159 were injured as a result of coercive measures or ill treatment during deportation. Once deported to their country of origin, 13 refugees were executed, at least 276 were ill-treated or persecuted by the police or the army, and at least 46 disappeared without trace.

<sup>81</sup> Source : Amnesty International, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/1999/42300199.htm>

<sup>82</sup> In this same report, Amnesty International draws attention to the fact that helmets can be dangerous if the visor is closed and prevents the detainee from breathing normally. Also, too much pressure on the windpipe could suffocate the person (Amnesty International, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/1999/42300199.htm>)

<sup>83</sup> Figures from, “The deadly consequences of Germany’s asylum policy 1993-2000”, information collected and published by ARI.

There are many difficulties involved in providing support for people threatened with deportation or who are on the point of being deported. It is difficult to obtain information about “illegal” immigrants and to gain access to the detention centres, which are practically no-go areas. It is not easy to ensure efficient support in these conditions. For example, how can you get information about what has happened to someone who has already been deported?

There are cases, however, in which people escape deportation  
Between February and April 2000, ARI helped six Ukrainian women in their struggle. Along with many other organisations and associations, ARI organised a major publicity campaign. Countless letters were sent to the authorities at the highest level, asking them to stop the deportation on compassionate grounds. Finally, after a hunger strike which lasted more than 60 days for some of the women, they all obtained their freedom from the Moabit detention centre in Berlin.

The day-to-day work carried out by ARI has led it to reflect on the question of institutional racism and its link to the racism displayed by individual people. ARI believes that racist acts perpetrated by individuals are very worrying, but government policies are of even more concern. The fact that asylum seekers and refugees are officially considered to be undesirables makes it legitimate and possible for people to commit acts of racist violence in Germany.

ARI has no way of being able to measure the effects of its work on peoples’ mentality. All it can say is that the organisation, along with others, has sometimes succeeded in attracting the attention of public opinion to certain specific cases. It has also managed, to a certain extent, to provoke a debate about racism in the police force and in the legal system and the racism underlying official asylum policy. It is, however, undeniable that ARI has witnessed an increase in racist violence during the last ten years.

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## AUSTRIA

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### CONTEXT AUSTRIA

<b>Population:</b>	8.1 million
<b>Number of refugees/Asylum Seekers:</b>	85,800
<b>Refugees per 1000 inhabitants:</b>	9.8
<b>Ratification of International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD):</b>	8 May 1972

#### **UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) main concerns (April 1999):**

- Number of incidents of xenophobia and racial discrimination, including acts of anti-Semitism.
- Lack of measures of protection of the rights of some “national ethnic minorities”(Czechs, Slovaks, Roma).
- Absence of sanctions against racial discrimination in the private sector.
- Reports of serious incidents of police brutality in dealing with persons of foreign origin and ethnic minorities, including the Roma.

*“In Austria, 1999 was an election year for the Parliament. During the campaigning, particularly in Vienna, the FPÖ, (Austrian Freedom Party), employed campaigning techniques exploiting xenophobia and racism against immigrants. Coupled with the previous statements made by its leader Jörg Haider, a climate of fear and intolerance was attempted to be stoked up against the immigrant and Jewish community. Some mainstream newspapers carried the campaigning adverts of the FPÖ and in the streets were placed placards and posters highlighting the dangers of the immigrant community. The use of the term “Überfremdung” in their campaigning caused particular concern among the Jewish community as it was the term used by the Nazis under the Hitler regime.*

*According to the Ministry of the Interior<sup>84</sup>, 717 charges were brought against alleged perpetrators of racism in 1999 (against 392 in 1998). The charges were brought as a result of 378 incidents with racial motivation (against 283 in 1998). Similarly an increase in the spreading of xenophobic propaganda from groups of the extreme right was recorded by the Ministry. Among the most severe incidents reported by the Ministry of Interior, which were*

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<sup>84</sup> Bundesministerium für Inneres, Gruppe C, Abt. II/7 (Ed. 2000): Rechtsextremismus, Neonazismus, Rechtsrevisionismus und fremdenfeindlich motivierte Gewaltkriminalität 1999. Wien, pp. 29–30; 34

highly publicised and in which charges were filed, were seven assaults, three cases of arson (including at a shelter for refugees), an anonymous threat against the President of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde and the desecration of a Jewish cemetery.

Two Turkish children, aged eleven and twelve were assaulted in the city of Graz by juveniles who verbally abused them with racial slurs and wounded one child with a knife. There was an assault on a Yugoslavian woman and her young daughter in a Viennese park by a man under the influence of alcohol. A Bosnian and a Turkish national were assaulted in a tram in Graz by an unemployed man who verbally abused and physically attacked them.

There were cases of arson in two bars in Vienna which are frequented by foreign nationals. All these attacks were carried out by four juveniles aged between 16 and 19 who allegedly belong to a Skinhead's group. The two 19-year olds who were also involved in other racist incidences were sentenced to five years in prison. The two younger perpetrators got a jail term of two and a half years.

With regard to anti-Semitism, there was a desecration of twelve grave-stones with Nazi rhetoric and symbols in a Jewish cemetery in Graz by unknown perpetrators. Another example was an assault of two young men by an Austrian pensioner who assumed the young men were of Jewish origin. The perpetrator who was under the influence of alcohol called them "Jewish pigs" and punched them in the face. Charges were brought by the victims<sup>85</sup>.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) criticised detentions (Schubhaft) of asylum-seekers in Austria, in particular of youths.<sup>86</sup> Because of inhuman conditions, the organisation SOS-Mitmensch asks for reforms relating to the detentions. They also point out that compared to previous years (8,200 in 1990) many more refugees have been detained in the past few years (about 15,000 people a year since 1994<sup>87</sup>).

Human rights groups, church organisations, and politicians sharply criticised Austria's detention and deportation practices during 1999. These groups and individuals, including the Austrian government's Minister for Family and Youth, were particularly critical of Austria's detention of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers<sup>88</sup>.

At the end of 1999, Austria hosted about 16,600 refugees and asylum seekers in need of protection, according to statistics provided by the Austrian government and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). These included 3,393 persons granted asylum during the year, 11,084 applicants pending a decision, and 1,600 Kosovo Albanians and 482 Bosnians with temporary protection at year's end. Asylum seekers filed 20,129 applications for asylum in Austria during 1999, a 46% increase from the 13,805 applications filed in 1998, and a 296% increase from the 6,791 applications filed in 1997<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> Bundesministerium für Inneres, Gruppe C, Abt. II/7 (Ed. 2000): Rechtsextremismus, Neonazismus, Rechtsrevisionismus und fremdenfeindlich motivierte Gewaltkriminalität 1999. Wien. pp. 31–33

<sup>86</sup> *ibid*

<sup>87</sup> ORF online: <http://www.orf.at/orfon/ticker/8771html?tmp=10665> ; accessed 27. 7. 00

<sup>88</sup> USCR: Country Information:Austria:  
<http://refugees.org/world/countryrpt/europe/austria.htm>

<sup>89</sup> *ibid*

*According to Amnesty International<sup>90</sup>, instances of police ill-treatment of foreigners is on the increase, especially during identity checks. Complaints mention detainees suffering blows from batons, punches and kicks and even pepper spray. The organisation stresses that disciplinary action against police officers committing these offences is slow to materialise or non-existent. Eight attacks by members of the police force on persons of foreign origin, motivated by racist sentiments, were recorded in 1999. Nine police officers were suspended.*

*On 1 May 1999, a twenty-five year old Nigerian asylum-seeker, Marcus Omofuma, died on a flight from Vienna to Sofia during an attempt to forcibly deport him. Austrian police officers had bound his arms and legs and covered his mouth with adhesive tape allegedly to stop his verbal protest on the plane.*

*There is an ongoing controversy whether his death has occurred as a result of suffocation, his medical condition (heart disease), or both.<sup>91</sup>”*

(European monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) Annual Report.)

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<sup>90</sup> Amnesty international Report 2000, POL 10/01/00 pp. 38–39

<sup>91</sup> Die Presse, 9. September 2000; Kurier, 15 Dezember 1999; Der Standard, 21 July 2000;

## “LAND OF PEOPLE” (“LAND DER MENSCHEN”)

“Land of people” is a vast forum for encounters and dialogue set up after the 1999 elections (that landed the FPO in government). A number of other initiatives in Austria are linked to this platform in one way or another.

“Land of people” is designed to be an initiative that transcends political and religious divides. It is not limited to a given region in Austria; rather, it is a truly national movement. “Land of people” seeks to check racism and xenophobia through dialogue and encounters.

It is worth noting at the outset that this initiative does not spring from the churches. As we have already stressed, “Land of people” is a non-denominational initiative to bring together men and women from all religious backgrounds. Notwithstanding, people from various churches participate and are deeply involved as individuals<sup>92</sup>. Even if funding comes largely from the private sector, certain religious bodies also make a contribution<sup>93</sup>. Finally, the churches are not absent in the implementation of the “Land of people” idea across Austria.

### “Land of people” – let’s talk about it

“We want Austria to be a country where everyone who lives here feels at home, where they can rely on their legal and human rights. A land of the people – a country where everyone contributes to living with each other. We want to see to it that no one is discriminated against or held in contempt because of their background, their language, religion or the colour of their skin, that everyone holds everyone else in respect. Anyone who suffers persecution in their home country should be able to find refuge and protection here according to our traditions and according to international standards.

We know about the numerous problems that people have encountered when they move here: in the workplace, in schools and in the neighbourhoods. We don’t think these problems can be either ignored or glossed over. Because it influences the whole atmosphere in this country, it concerns us all. We want to talk to each other about this. Some problems can be easily solved, others can be more easily lived with.

Austria owes its identity, its history, its cultural and technical achievements to people of diverse backgrounds. Today, Austria stands again at the threshold of challenge and chance – to integrate the immigrants as in earlier periods. We want to make a contribution to this process. We don’t want fear and prejudice to dictate our activities; racism and xenophobia can have no place in our country. Austria is not only a land of mountains, but also a land of people – let’s talk about it.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> This is the case, in particular, of Michael Bubik (pastor working for the “Protestant service to aid refugees in Austria” EFDO), Ursula Struppe (who belongs to the Catholic church of Austria) or Helmut Schüller (priest who deals with problems at school).

<sup>93</sup> The Austrian Bishops’ Conference, for example, finances the coordinator of the project, Ursula Struppe !

<sup>94</sup> This text comes from the “Land of people” website: <http://www.landdermenschen.at/initiatives>.



“Land of people” was launched by a number of eminent Austrians – some famous, some less so. Whether they be journalists, actors, writers, bankers, doctors, political leaders or restaurant owners, they all share the will to combat prejudice, which is the bedrock of xenophobia and racism. These are not just people driven by strong religious or humanitarian ideals but also individuals who simply wish to create a better atmosphere for all in Austria. Some are foreigners who have lent their image to demonstrate the assets of diversity within society; others are Austrian but also wished to become involved:

\* **Ivica Osim** coaches the popular Sturm Graz soccer team; he originally comes from former Yugoslavia; *“in life, like in soccer, it is always wonderful to be able to learn from other cultures. Everything then becomes possible.”*

\* **Andreas Treichl** runs the “First Bank”: *“xenophobia is a dreadful thing, both for those who see it and those who endure it”.*

Like the initiative “Invite your neighbours” in Germany (see above), “Land of people” encourages individuals to become involved and promote an open, tolerant society. To this end, advice or suggestions are given to enable people to take action. “ Be it in a group of children, young people, in associations or initiatives, at school or at university, on the Internet or in one’s private life, it is always possible to work for better cohabitation among people of different origins.”

#### **Even private individuals can become involved !**

° By inviting people home. An invitation to dinner or just to talk creates links and provides an insight into the situation experienced by foreigners, for example. We can welcome colleagues from work or parents of children in the same class as our own...What about a party at home to which we might invite all the people who live next door but whom we hardly know ? People from other countries often find it is very difficult to overcome their isolation, to make contact or establish relations with Austrians.

° Be sensitive and caring towards people; do not avoid dialogue, seek every opportunity for mutual understanding. Do not remain silent when someone is badly treated because his or her language, religion, culture or skin colour is different. Intervene rather than watching from a distance when faced with flagrant injustice.

This initiative is also designed to answer the questions people have about immigration or racism and xenophobia. It likewise seeks to dispel certain preconceived ideas and misconceptions.

° **How many foreigners live in Austria ?**

750 000 foreigners live in Austria, that is, 9.2% of the population

° **“In the past few years, too many foreigners have immigrated to Austria ! “**

First of all, Austria has always been a haven for all those who had to flee their country as a result of war or persecution. After the Second World War, Austria took in over 420 000 refugees from eastern Europe, 320 000 of whom settled permanently in the country. Austria welcomed a second wave of immigrants in the 70s to make up for a shortage of labour. Finally, the third wave dates back to the 90s following the wars that wreaked destruction in the Balkans (Croatia, Bosnia–Herzegovina and Kosovo)

° **“Foreigners are a drain on the Austrian social system !”**

According to the statistics of the national employment office, in 1993, foreign workers contributed approximately 32.5 billion Schillings to state coffers (thanks to taxes and other levies) while they cost only 22.2 billion Schillings during the same period. Foreign workers request markedly less sick leave than nationals since they are at greater risk of being dismissed.

° **“Austria gives political asylum to too many foreigners !”**

As signatory of the Geneva conventions on the rights of refugees, Austria has a duty to give asylum to all those who are persecuted in their country for religious, political or ethnic reasons. Of course, proof of this persecution must be provided. Those who are officially recognized as “political refugees” obtain the right to remain in the country in addition to a small amount of financial support, if necessary. The others are considered to be ‘illegal’ and can therefore be sent back to their country of origin. In 1999, only 3393 of the 20 129 requests for asylum were accepted (that is, about 17% of applications).

**What does “Land of people” consist in ?**

The initiative is simply designed to foster encounters and dialogue between the local and foreign population. To this end, lectures, evenings or discussion forums are organized.

° For example, an evening was held in Vienna on the 22 November 2000 on the theme “foreigners and locals in Vienna”. The purpose was to address everyone’s problems and fears and to give examples of successful integration. How can people of different origin live together in harmony ? That is a key issue for the future of society.

° On the 28 November, a women’s evening for encounter and dialogue was organized by “Land of people” together with other associations. The aim of the evening was to discuss

Islam the input of the Muslim women present. After dinner, a true dialogue was established. A number of questions were put to the Muslim women: Did they feel oppressed by the rather patriarchal Islamic system? How did they view wearing a veil? The women participants also ended up asking questions of themselves: what image of a woman did they wish to promote in Austria? What difficulties did they encounter in their daily life as foreigners or natives? The questions were interesting, the dialogue open; together, they all sought answers and solutions to individual problems.

° The initiative “Land of people” in the Burgenland region had the excellent idea of sending a letter to all the mayors suggesting that they invite the immigrants living in their district to come to talk. The message says, *“in each of our villages, there are people whose country of origin is not Austria. They would doubtless appreciate an invitation from the mayor, even simply for a first encounter; this initial contact could spark other meetings, and not just with the local authorities. Indeed, when we meet others, our prejudices tend to dissolve.”*

It is difficult to assess the initiative “Land of people”. First, because the programme is probably too recent for its effects to be felt as yet. Second, it appears difficult to measure the effect produced as the scope of “Land of people” is vast and its objectives very general; indeed, the aim is to change people’s way of thinking across Austrian society.

On 1 April 2000, “Land of people” decided to spark a debate in the street. We installed a booth in a pedestrian area in Vienna to ask the views of passers-by and compare them.

*“I have been living in Vienna for 25 years. In the beginning, I felt Iranian, but now I am made to feel that I am just a foreigner”* confided the owner of a restaurant.

A woman said to two other women of Turkish origin: *“they just don’t want to integrate, they collect in ghettos”*.

These are a few of the statements recorded that day. The theme of the day was: to what extent should foreigners adapt and to what extent should Austrians born here accept the difference?

One of the highlights of that particular day was no doubt the clash between a passer-by and a Muslim engineer. The former: *“If we’re not careful, they’ll steal all we have. One thing is certain – Islam is spreading”*. Both got hot under the collar and started gesticulating wildly as they violently disagreed. However, 45 minutes later, they were still side by side; they even ended up shaking hands. Of course, differences of opinion remained but both said they were pleased to have been able to discuss them.

*"A constructive evening"* was the verdict given by many people on the encounter organized by "Land of people" in a high-rise building on the outskirts of Vienna.

A newcomer to Austria said: *"if a bicycle is stolen in the building, we are always the first to be suspected"*.

Another woman wearing a headscarf confided in hesitant German: *"I say hello to everyone, but apart from one lady, nobody returns my greeting"*.

On the other hand, people comment on the dish antennae that proliferate in the building. *"If everyone does what they like, it just won't do"*.

Then there was a quarrel between two children which degenerated into a full-blown conflict between natives and foreigners because the respective mothers intervened.

That evening sowed the first seeds of dialogue. However, as the organiser admitted, ***"a great deal remains to be solved through dialogue in Austria"***.

## **"BEING A STRANGER" ("FREMD SEIN")**

**"B**eing a stranger" is a set of teaching material to:

- ° explain the reasons for immigrating and clearly describe the situation of immigrants and asylum-seekers in Austria and
- ° fight prejudice among children and young people.

Widespread xenophobia, the general fear of being submerged by an influx of immigrants and refugees, the fact that foreigners are held responsible for all the problems in Austria...These are the reasons for producing the "Being a stranger" kit.

The kit contains historical, philosophical, religious, psychological and political material on foreigners. It includes, above all, exercises and outline lessons for all those who work with children or young people. The box also contains a number of articles on the reality of immigration in Austria, the most common preconceived ideas and why they are mistaken, right-wing extremism, the situation of immigrant children in Austria...

This kit was designed by Catholic Youth in the archdiocese of Vienna, with the financial support of the Council of Europe as part of the European Youth Campaign against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance. Part of the material contained in the kit "Being a stranger" is also available on the "Land of people" website. Since 1993, nearly 200 000 copies of the kit have been produced for schools, of course, but also for churches, parishes and the various ecumenical youth organizations.

Action by Catholic Youth in the archdiocese of Vienna is based on the following finding: we are forced to accept the fact there are foreigners; it is impossible to expel them all, to ignore them or seek to integrate them completely. Under the circumstances, we must learn to consider foreigners as not just necessary for Austria, as workers, but above all as an integral part of our country as human beings. One has to put oneself in a foreigner's shoes. This kit should help people to change, to adopt another perspective, a more human, Christian angle.

Here are a few examples of what the box "Being a stranger" contains.

**"Being different from the others"** is an example of a lesson for young children. The aim is to show that being and acting differently from others is not always a bad thing. On the contrary, it may benefit a group if its members are not all the same or do not all behave in the same way. The purpose is to show children the advantages of diversity.

° The lesson begins with a **game**, which looks easy at first but is in fact far from it: all the children in the class must try to behave in the same way. After a few minutes, which prove how difficult the exercise is, the game is evaluated by asking a few questions: have the goals of the game been met? Who did you look at in trying to adapt your behaviour? What are the advantages of all being the same? ...

° A **short story** is then told: "On a beach, a group of seagulls stands facing the sea; but one seagull is turned the other way: it is looking in the opposite direction, with its beak facing the wind. The group accuses the deviant gull of being "repulsive" and "upsetting the harmony of the community". Then a cat suddenly appears from behind the group of gulls; the gull that is alone because it is facing the opposite way sees the danger and shouts "look out, fly away!". And the whole flock of gulls takes flight."

° After that the material recommends **seeking the children's impressions**: what lessons do they learn from this tale? What do they think about the criticism "upsetting the harmony of the community"? Does belonging to a group force all members to be the same or is it better to cultivate differences? ...

Obviously, the tale of the seagulls is just an example and one can imagine other variations on this theme.

As to the situation of immigrants and asylum-seekers in Austria, Catholic Youth in Vienna has also devised some lessons for young and older children.

### Foreigners in Austria: lesson for 11 to 15 year olds

The aim is to foster understanding of why people decide to leave their country and what their situation is in Austria.

Four large charts are required for this lesson.

- ° On the first chart, it is necessary to draw a map of Austria with arrows pointing to the interior of the country; each arrow represents one of the reasons for immigrating. Students must therefore figure out why certain people decide to abandon all they have to immigrate to Austria (persecution in the country of origin owing to membership of a given group, for example the Kurds in Turkey, or another race or religion, unemployment, famine, lack of future prospects, profit-seeking...)
- ° on the second chart, students are requested to identify various prejudices linked to foreigners and more specifically to refugees (they take advantage of Austria's wealth without contributing their share, they are thieves, they take jobs away from the Austrians...)
- ° The third chart sets out official facts or figures in order to disprove some of the aforementioned prejudices.
- ° Finally, the class is divided into several parts and each group must put itself in the shoes of a refugee arriving in Austria and try to imagine the problems he or she will encounter (language barrier, cultural shock, loneliness...) Each idea is noted on the fourth chart.

At the end of the exercise, the four charts are brought together and the class has a comprehensive view of the different aspects of immigration and asylum.

## EVANGELICAL REFUGEE SERVICE (“EFDÖ”)

In this section, we shall be highlighting the work of an agency that assists and supports refugees. We realize it is not an antiracist organization per se. However, through its work, this service constantly has to deal with xenophobia and racism; above all, certain aspects of its activities, as we shall see, can rightfully be viewed as measures to combat xenophobia and racism. Working to integrate refugees is, after all, an effective means of eradicating the causes of racist and xenophobic behaviour.

The Protestant Refugee Service (“Evangelische Flüchtling-Dienst Österreich”: EFDÖ) is a branch of Protestant Relief, which comes under the Protestant churches and Austrian diaconia. In 1991, a Protestant pastor from Traiskirchen (Lower Austria) opened the doors of the church to a group of 90 refugees the state was unable to care for. Initially, just a few

volunteers helped these refugees with very limited funds; the Protestant Refugee Service was not officially created until 1994. EFDÖ is a member of the INTO<sup>95</sup> network.

The activities of the Evangelical Refugee Service can be subdivided into several fields more or less linked to the problem of xenophobia and racism.

### **Advisory services**

Advisory services are offered in two places: the Protestant church of Traiskirchen, where the largest refugee camp in Austria is located; the other place where refugees can obtain assistance is in Vienna. Refugees are sent by the Traiskirchen advisory service (which is mainly responsible for advising new asylum-seekers) and the Vienna centre to another advisory service that specialises in integration. The purpose of this latter service is to draw up an integration plan with the refugees, advise them and give them support at each stage of their integration, inform them of potential courses and training and secure funding for such courses, then help them to find a job and housing as well as assist them with all their social and psychological problems.

There are any number of difficulties. To start with, EFDÖ insists on the need to learn German before even finding a job, with a view to integration in the long term. However, newcomers do not always fully understand this viewpoint and free or cheap courses are extremely rare, not to mention the prohibitive cost of books and notebooks. Furthermore, the refugees, for political reasons, are often relegated to arduous, precarious, poorly paid jobs. EFDÖ encourages them to accept this kind of job anyway, in the hope it will lead to other more worthwhile, better paid jobs that will pave the way to full integration in Austrian society.

### **Supply of housing**

First of all, as many receive no social welfare, EFDÖ has set up a home for asylum-seekers and homeless refugees.

Another project, which is being run for the sixth consecutive year, is “Aktion Mobiles Notquartier”, which seeks to provide emergency accommodation on a rotating basis.

“Aktion Mobiles Notquartier” is an ecumenical programme that was set up in conjunction with the Catholic organisation, CARITAS. The aim is to find Catholic or Protestant parishes throughout the country that are willing to take in ten homeless asylum-seekers for two weeks in the winter months (October to May). During this time, the parishes must provide a hot meal and breakfast for their guests. At the end of the two-week period, the asylum-seekers leave the parish for another one. This action is an excellent illustration of how the churches can combine assistance for refugees, building awareness of the problem of asylum and welcoming refugees. EFDÖ considers that conscientization should go hand in hand with personal contacts. “Aktion Mobiles Notquartier” is a good example.

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<sup>95</sup> INTO is an ecumenical initiative that seeks to integrate refugees in European society. It groups together six small ecumenical organisations (both Protestant and Orthodox) in four different countries within the European Union (Austria, Belgium, Italy and Greece). The aim is to increase cooperation and exchanges of information.

EFDÖ also seeks to rent empty apartments, which are fitted out with the help of the refugees themselves and then sub-let to them as a first home. Flats are rented for no longer than three years. Then, insofar as possible, permanent housing is sought for the person or family concerned, which can take out its own lease for three years or more. In March, 2000, over 80 refugees from Sierra Leone, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Palestine, Rwanda, Kosovo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Irak and Angola were housed in 45 flats.

### **Odd jobs like “help among neighbours”**

EFDÖ tries to give refugees housed in these start-up flats and also in the EFDÖ home an opportunity to become eligible for higher allowances by accepting odd jobs that augment their “income”. For example, in spring and summer, refugees can work in nearby gardens. Through this existing project, EFDÖ wishes to develop a model that will give refugees structured access to work that so far has only been available on the black market, i.e. without any social security coverage.

### **Education**

In addition to support and assistance for refugees, EFDÖ works to raise awareness among schools and Protestant parishes. This activity is carried out under the initiative “Land of people”; it entails courses to combat racism for pupils, briefing sessions and the distribution of teaching material for school teachers, school visits to refugees and seminars in the parishes. The aim of this work is to challenge false statements made about refugees and asylum-seekers. One should not believe only adults have preconceived ideas. Very early on, children may develop negative, biased opinions of certain individuals or groups of people.

#### **“Prejudice never springs from a mere individual but from a social group.”**

Prejudice is not a person’s individual opinion as a result of a bad experience; rather, it is the opinion shared by a group. This means, for example, that the inhabitants of a given region are convinced that those from another region tend to be criminals or something similar. Or a nation comes to believe that another country is inferior.

“Prejudice towards a given type of person does not spring from the fact that a specific member of the group had a bad experience with that kind of person. On the contrary, prejudice exists prior to any kind of contact and thereafter rules out a normal encounter.”

This means that prejudice is assimilated by children because of their parents, other adults or even friends.

Before a child has ever been in contact with a refugee, he or she learns, for example, that they come to Austria to take jobs and housing from the Austrians...in this way, children learn that refugees are dirty, smell bad and are mainly criminals. The first time the child meets refugees, he will naturally be very mistrustful and sceptical.

“One difference between misjudgement and prejudice is the fact that it is far more difficult to correct a prejudice.”

Prejudice is not only something that is deeply rooted in us but it also serves a purpose to the extent that it shields us from uncertainty and helps us reinforce our ego by running others down.



It is therefore not enough to give the people concerned objective information to prove their prejudices are over-simplifications and erroneous. Meeting and spending time with the group of persons incriminated is the only means of perhaps changing their judgment.<sup>96</sup>

In general, the content of the courses given in schools is as follows:

° The first step is a “brain storming” session; what experiences have pupils had with foreigners. Generally all kinds of answers are given, ranging from: “they are my best friends” to “they should all be exterminated”. One must refrain from commenting on these statements even if it sometimes very difficult, because any criticism would reinforce the prejudices expressed.

° In the second part of the lesson, we try to show that everyone differentiates between different categories of people in their own mind. A distinction is drawn between foreigners who contribute something to Austria (tourists, skilled workers...) and those who are not welcome, like refugees.

° In a third part, we explain why these people leave their country. This discussion encourages pupils to reflect on the complex causes of violence and conflict, which incite thousands of people to give up everything they have. A few ideas are presented and explained: the concept of asylum, the definition of a refugee...

° The circumstances in which the refugees had to flee their country are then discussed, as well as the welcome they met in Austria, compared to what they hoped.

° In the fifth part of the lesson, we show where the refugees live and what their real standards of living are. Pupils can thus see how small their lodgings are, how scant the furniture...

° Finally, a brief discussion allows us to gather the pupils’ impressions of what they have seen. Information is also given on the means of helping refugees or how to assist in the integration of child refugees, for example.

Ideally, we try to organize school outings to visit refugee homes. In this way, pupils can meet, speak with and spend time with the individuals who are the object of their prejudices.

During the 1999-2000 period, 24 seminars were held in a number of parishes. EFDÖ also organized 42 hours of lessons in schools and 17 excursions to visit refugee homes.

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<sup>96</sup> This excerpt comes from a presentation by Ruth Glaser (in charge of educational work at EFDO) at a UNITED conference on “Resisting violence against minorities” held from June 30 to July 4, 2000.

## REACTIONS OF THE AUSTRIAN CHURCHES TO THE ENTRY OF THE FPO INTO THE GOVERNEMENT COALITION: PROCESS LEADING TO THE PUBLICATION OF A SERIES OF “RECOMMENDATIONS” FOR VOTERS

The project is designed to exemplify a certain kind of church intervention in the Austrian political debate. This process is not an initiative directly aimed at combatting racism or racial violence. Let us be quite clear: the aim is not to condemn a given party or to advise voters to vote for some other party; the purpose is simply to recall Christian values and draw attention to the fact that certain ideas may run counter to these values.

We decided to focus on this project as it seems clear that the political environment directly or indirectly influences ambient racism. Racist allusions, gross over-simplifications of a xenophobic sort and the stigmatising of foreigners as the source of all evils may indeed be perceived by extremist groups as an incitement to hatred and racist violence.

When Jörg Haider’s party officially joined the government in early February 2000, the event sparked much hue and outcry in Europe and even beyond. The European Union decided to place Austria in “diplomatic quarantine” while the United States and Israel firmly condemned the new government. In Austria itself, the creation of the new government triggered gigantic demonstrations, particularly in Vienna.

The Austrian churches, on the contrary, showed great restraint. The Catholic church, the largest in Austria, urged the population to remain calm and show moderation; it deplored the exclusion measures taken by the European Union but refrained from condemning Jörg Haider’s FPO.<sup>97</sup> This attitude was strongly criticised, particularly in Western Europe.<sup>98</sup> According to many Austrian religious leaders, foreign criticism of their country denoted a total lack of understanding and was counter-productive since the “anti-Austrian measures made Jörg Haider the most famous Austrian”.<sup>99</sup> All the churches also pointed out that the coalition government had been democratically elected and that “any government, including this one, was entitled to be judged in light of its action”, as recalled by the head of the Catholic church in Austria, Cardinal Schönborn.<sup>100</sup> A spokesman of the Catholic archdiocese of Vienna specified further that his church, which represents 70% of the 7.8 million Austrians, “could not influence the formation of governments”.<sup>101</sup> However, insofar as future action by the new government was concerned, the churches promised to be vigilant.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ecumenical News International (ENI) Bulletin, 16 February 2000: “Austria crisis is a “severe warning” to churches, says ecumenical leader”.

<sup>98</sup> In this respect, one can quote Paul Pasteur who wrote in the *Monde diplomatique* in March 2000 (“Autriche, pourquoi la dérive”): “Jörg Haider, the man who until 1995 called for “respect for the veterans of the Waffen SS”, who describes Romanians as pickpockets, who compares Europe to a chicken coop, who places the fate of the Germans in Sudetenland and Jewish victims of Nazism on the same footing, is at the head of the party with which the Christian Social party, on 3 February 2000, chose to form an alliance amid the resounding silence of the Catholic church.”

<sup>99</sup> According to Herwitt Sturm, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, in the ENI Bulletin, 8 March 2000: “Isolating Austria has made Jörg Haider famous.”

<sup>100</sup> ENI Bulletin, 8 March 2000: “Isolating Austria has made Jörg Haider famous.”

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Eric Leichtenberg, spokesman of the archdiocese of Vienna, declared in this respect: “For over 50 years, the Austrian bishops have followed a policy of not intervening in party politics or the formation of governments. However, the church has, on many occasions, criticised the attitudes of the FPO, which are not in keeping with a

A few dissident voices were raised within the church despite this unanimity. While attending the huge demonstration against the entry of the FPO into the coalition government on the 19 February in Vienna, Gertraud Knoll, superintendent of the Evangelical Church in the Burgenland region, expressed her disgust at the methods and ideas of J. Haider's party, which reminded her of the dark hours of Austrian history. This statement triggered strong reactions, even within certain religious circles. The FPO, in an open letter to bishop Herwitt Sturm (Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church), expressed "the great dismay caused by the Evangelical Church in the Burgenland region".<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, an independent platform made up of Evangelical Christians began to gather signatures asking for the resignation of Gertraud Knoll.<sup>104</sup> Far more serious, however, shortly after the demonstration on the 19 February, the superintendent received a number of death threats directed against both herself and her family, thereby forcing her to take an extended "holiday".<sup>105</sup> Although a number of Evangelical church leaders and many pastors publicly expressed their support for Gertraud Knoll and condemned the death threat campaign mounted against her, others deplored the fact that the superintendent had been left pretty much alone to cope with this ordeal.

Following this episode, a conference gathering religious leaders from across Europe but mainly Austria met at the instigation of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). The conference was held in Vienna on the 30 May 2000 on the theme of the political responsibility of the churches, in particular in the face of mounting racism and xenophobia embodied in the extreme right wing or nationalist, populist type parties.

The meeting was marked in particular by two presentations: the first, by university professor **Ulrich H.J.Körtner** on the theme "**the political responsibility of the churches**",<sup>106</sup> and the second by Bishop Heinrich Bolleter on the "**political responsibility of the churches and common strategies concerning the problems of racism and xenophobia**".<sup>107</sup>

**Professor Körtner** underscored the indispensable political responsibility of the churches, from a theological and historical perspective. He then addressed the Austrian churches more specifically and emphasized their duties in light of their historical past; they must continue to examine and critically assess their attitude and mistakes during the troubled period of national-socialism. Concerning the current upsurge of racism and xenophobia, Professor Körtner welcomed the stances of the general synod or the Ecumenical Council of Churches of Austria but insisted on the fact that it is absolutely necessary for the churches to analyse these scourges. Such work on the phenomenon of right-wing populism is sorely lacking. On the one hand racism and xenophobia are firmly condemned but on the other, the churches

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Christian standpoint. It is closely monitoring what the government does and will not hesitate to raise its voice if human rights are infringed". (ENI Bulletin, 8 March 2000).

<sup>103</sup> Source: ORF news ([http://religion.orf.at/tv/news/ne00321\\_knoll.htm](http://religion.orf.at/tv/news/ne00321_knoll.htm))

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> "Die politische Verantwortung der Kirche(n)" (The church's political responsibility)

<sup>107</sup> "Die politische Verantwortung der Kirchen und gemeinsame Strategien für das Zeugnis angesichts Rassismus und Xenophobie" (The churches' political responsibility and common strategies for witness against racism and xenophobia).

remain strictly equidistant from all the parties, including the FPO. The reasons for the success of the nationalist populist party should therefore be studied together with the themes it pursues in order subsequently to devise strategies for action. For example, there is need to examine the images conveyed by the FPO like the “foreign invasion” or “Islamisation of Europe” and show how they contradict Christian values. Likewise, the vote in favour of the FPO largely appeared to be a protest or resentment vote; in this respect, the churches should tackle the causes of such discontent among a large swathe of the population. In conclusion, one should not confuse neutrality vis-à-vis the political parties and indifference to the values at stake.

According to **Bishop Heinrich Bolleter**, the issue is not whether the churches should participate in the political debate or not but rather what contribution they should make and at what moment in time. The bishop distinguished between several instances in which the churches should intervene (when the principle of divine sovereignty is called into question by the personality cult of a demagogical leader, when human dignity is threatened, when individual freedom is exercised to the detriment of the principle of solidarity...) Church intervention must begin within its own ranks; for there are many people in church circles who sympathize with this extreme populist right-wing and it is worth noting that in Austria, the regions where the FPO scored the most votes are often known for their religious fervour.

At the end of the conference, the participants reached the following conclusions:

- ° Ecumenical cooperation in Europe and even within countries offers major opportunities but for the time being is underused.

- ° The churches should work together to demand that efforts be made in education given that ignorance and lack of education are fertile ground for the ideas of the extreme populist right-wing.

- ° The churches must play their role as political partner, not just in terms of public declarations (pastors’ letters, announcements by the Ecumenical Councils...) but also in more practical terms by preparing their members to reflect on the content of political debate and question the various candidates.

The members of the Ecumenical Council of Churches of Austria have, for their part, decided to set up a sort of supervisory group to review the themes and issues taken up during the next elections. This group will check whether future electoral debates are compatible with Christian values; the aim is not to condemn any given party but to give voters guide-lines.

This idea will be put into practice at the end of November 2000, the date on which the Ecumenical Council of Churches of Austria will be publishing a text called “*Bemüht euch um das Wohl der Stadt*” (“Seek the welfare of the city,” Jeremiah 29, 7) addressed to “*all Christian men and women and people of good will in Austria*”. This recalls, first of all, that in a democracy, sovereignty springs from the people; each Christian man or woman, or more broadly speaking, each individual, thus bears special responsibility. This declaration is not a recommendation for voting issued by the churches; it is simply a set of critical questions designed to foster reflection and sharpen the critical awareness of voters. These questions cover various fields, but some refer directly to the themes of racism and xenophobia.

## Questions on political responsibility

*"Seek the welfare of the city" (Jeremiah 19:7)*

*"Let your word be 'yes, yes' or 'no, no'" (Matthew 5:37)*

- Are the problems that have to be tackled honestly identified or are they covered up?
- Are the promises and prospects given for the future credible?
- Are other people, interest groups and parties spoken of respectfully?
- Are people's fears, insecurities and prejudices fomented or played down? If so, how and to what degree?

*"There will be no-one in need among you" (Deuteronomy 15:4)*

- What measures are planned to tackle poverty in Austria?
- What concrete social measures go together with advocacy of the "social market economy"?
- What place is given to the demand for social balance in the intended economy measures?
- What is being done towards the goal of social justice?
- What measures are proposed to enable Austria to fulfil its responsibility for the poor countries of the world?
- Is there any mention of Austria's contribution to development aid?

*"God...loves the strangers"*

*(Deuteronomy 10:18)*

- Are foreigners respected as part of our society?
- Are they allowed an appropriate place?
- Are decent living conditions foreseen for asylum seekers? Are they offered a roof over their heads, medical care in case of illness and a minimum subsistence allowance?
- Are asylum procedures fair and respectful of human dignity?
- What proposals are made for a policy to promote integration?

*"Righteousness exalts a nation"*

*(Proverbs 14:34)*

- What do politicians, journalists and representatives of minority parties say?
- What is the tone of their comments about the work of the police, legal procedures and penal law?
- Is freedom of opinion in full force or is there a tendency to intimidate critical voices?

*The earth is the Lord's"*

*(Psalm 14:1)*

- What importance is attached to the protection of all life?
- What place is given to the natural bases of life?
- What opinion is expressed on genetic engineering?
- Does it show respect for creation?

*"Blessed are the peacemakers"*

*(Matthew 5:9)*

- What importance is given to military solutions as against social, political and cultural means of conflict resolution?
- What is to be done for mutual understanding and tolerance in education, cultural and social policy?

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