



**Convened by:**  
**Thanos Dokos and Effie Fokas**

## **Summary**

The introductory, welcoming, and keynote addresses attempted to sketch the issues regarding the state of Christian-Muslim relations. Dr. Dokos urged for the 'un-demonisation' of Islam and the need for empathy, understanding and dialogue between the Christian and Islamic religious traditions. He raised the question of whether existing institutions on the national and the European levels are adequate for the realization of these goals, and to what extent institutional innovation is needed. The mechanisms through which Islam in particular and religions in general are conceived as a problem rather than as a positive contribution to international order were analysed by Dr. Mitri.

The first panel took up the challenge of Dr. Mitri's paper and tried to depict a more nuanced image of Islam in Europe. The diversities among Muslim communities in Europe were discussed by Prof. Nielsen. He attributed differences to four main factors: national or ethnic criteria, internal religious variations, socio-economic standards, and the particular European context where these communities reside. A focused analysis of Islam in the Balkans was presented by Prof. Bougarel. The diversity of Muslim communities was also stressed in the Balkan setting, but with some unifying characteristics: the strong institutionalisation of religious life and the long experience of being a member of a religious minority. Taken together, the contributions of Prof. Nielsen and Prof. Bougarel communicated a message of warning against generalisation about Muslim communities in Europe. Drawing on their expertise, they provided insight into elements of diversity which are not easily perceivable from an 'outsider's' perspective. In the last presentation, the role of Islam in Turkey was explored, introducing a discussion of the concept and consequences of 'fundamentalist secularism'. Prof. Gulalp analysed the symbiosis of a peculiar state-sponsored secularism with the notion of a Muslim national identity. He concluded that anti-democratic practices in Turkey are the result of secular preconceptions rather than Islamic influence.

The next panel tried to sketch present European policies on religion. Dr. Anagnostou lamented the lack of an overall, unified EU policy on religious and ethnic minorities. She commented, though, that increasingly, and especially through the enlargement process, the European policies and practices are beginning to effectively address minority issues. She also provided an overview of EU policies which, albeit indirectly, affect the status of religious and ethnic minorities in EU member states. Second, in respect to education, Prof. Dragonas proposed the distinction of those EU states that either have an official religion or support one religion, those with a relative autonomy between state and church and finally secular states. She urged that all three variations should experiment for the attenuation of plural education system. These remarks were nicely linked by the discussant Prof. Davie who argued that ultimately the questions Europeans need to pose are to think of which forms of religions are acceptable in the European context and second, to inquire on whether liberalism should be protected by illiberal measures in banning certain religious practices. Discussion of the French, Dutch, and Swedish cases followed, linked by the theme of secularism in contemporary Europe.

During the second day of the workshop the discussion was transposed into the Greek context. The presenters of the first panel all agreed for the dynamic nature and the need for further change in the religious landscape in Greece, through attention to a number of themes applicable to a broader European context – including church-state relations, nationalism, mission and proselytism, and education. Prof. Makrides analysed the pluralisation of the contemporary Greek society. In respect to the existing close ties between the Greek state and the Orthodox Church, he argued for allowing a stronger public presence of other faiths, but with the simultaneous recognition of the leading position of Orthodox Christianity in the Greek context. The role of religion in the shaping of national identity was presented as key to the current influence of religion in politics. The next speakers stressed the urgency for transformations within the realm of Orthodox Christianity. Dr. Papathanasiou sought to find a new role for religion in public life through a reformulation of the Christian concept of mission. Mission, in his understanding, becomes a continuous dialogue for the search for truth, in which other religious traditions and the other non-religious political ideologies also participate. Mr. Kalaitzidis cautioned against the dangers of catechism in the Greek school education system. He concluded by presenting a proposal for a new school course on religion that takes religious diversity into account and focuses on Orthodoxy from the perspective of culture. In the discussion which followed, a number of parallels were drawn with other European cases, and it was agreed that the question of religion in public education requires systematic, interdisciplinary examination across Europe (and, in particular, within the European Union). Closing this session, Archimandrite Papathomas addressed the subject of inter-religious marriages, increasingly pertinent in European societies with large immigrant populations. In the Greek context and beyond, marriages between Christians and Muslims are surrounded by social taboos which, according to Archimandrite Papathomas, should be overcome and which can be overcome with the help of the respective faiths. He explained that the church's notion of marriage should correspond to presence of a multicultural civil society, and he urged for the immediate recognition of mixed marriages by the Greek Orthodox Church. Archimandrite Papathomas' talk prompted a lively discussion on elements of religious fundamentalism in various religious and national contexts throughout Europe, elements which could be fruitfully approached and influenced through interdisciplinary and inter-religious (including also both religious and secular approaches) discussion.

The last panel supplemented the discussion of the Greek case through an exploration of the legal and political framework that regulates the relations between the state and religion and inter-religious disputes. Dr. Ktistakis noted that the existing Greek legal system is not in complete agreement with the European framework of minority rights. He illustrated this point through the example of the Turkish minority in Thrace. In this case, the status of the minority is often hampered by the overarching considerations of the Greek-Turkish bilateral relations. Prof. Delikonstantis attempted to answer existing criticisms of the human rights regime coming from official Orthodox circles. He argued that the institution of universal human rights is compatible with the Orthodox notion of a person-based society. The discussant, Dr. Tsitselikis, briefly analysed the legal basis upon which inter-religious and state-religion relations have been framed in the Greek case. He then asked whether new norms are needed to govern these relations (in Greece and beyond) and on which basis these should be developed.

The workshop ended with a roundtable discussion that attempted to revisit and make connections among all the topics that were addressed. In respect to the study and treatment of religion, participants insisted on the primacy of the European context, in the sense that the open issue of the European future tends to transcend the model of secular modernity. In

this respect, it was thought to be important to conduct further research on the concrete ways through which religious tradition can contribute to processes of democratisation in the European context. It was also deemed important by some of the participants to focus on non-state actors and highlight immediate social practices and spontaneous innovations that contribute towards more open and democratic inter-religious and generally societal relations.

### **Scientific Content of the Event**

The workshop had a truly interdisciplinary character as it befits the topic. It combined sociological, political science, theological, legal studies and policy perspectives. There was thus no unifying scientific element apart from grappling with the same issues through a kaleidoscope of approaches. In this sense, the workshop was more dialogic in spirit rather than being committed to the accumulation of knowledge. In particular, attention was paid to the diversity of Muslim communities in Europe: pertaining to their social or political roles, their differences in theological beliefs, their legal status. Emphasis was also given to the relations between the state or other political actors and religion, and among religious traditions. These relations were described as necessarily complex since they combine a variety of political, social, economic, cultural, and theological aspects. In the discussion of contemporary Greek society the interdisciplinary approach worked the best, since recommendations for more democratised institutions in the Greek context focused on all sides of the equation: state policies, measures in relation to the consolidation of a Greek civil society and to Orthodox theology and practice.

### **Assessment of the Results**

The workshop intended to move from the general to the particular. It began by discussing the state of Muslim-Christian relations in Europe, and then managed to focus on the same set of relations in the Greek context. Particular recommendations were proposed in respect to the adoption of existing practices at the European level, or in particular EU states, in the Greek case. For instance, there were calls for the application of the European framework on the equal treatment of religious minorities in Greece. Or, on the topic of the role of religion in the Greek school education system, different models that other European countries follow were considered. Nevertheless, attention was also paid to some aspects that render the Greek society immune to the uncritical imposition of foreign models. In this respect, it was deemed important to engage with the Christian Orthodox tradition in the search for a more open and democratised Greek society. The Orthodox tradition was conceived as dynamic, in the sense that it allows and indeed can foster inter-religious dialogue and further support the pluralisation of the religious landscape in Greece. Discussion of the Greek case served as a basis from which participant scholars from different parts of Europe addressed themes in Christian-Muslim relations in other European milieu. The discussion revealed interesting commonalities at the local level, in spite of vast cultural and religious differences in the various European countries.

### **Contribution to the Future Direction of the Field**

It was clear from the proceedings of the workshop that the study of religions can only be fruitful through an interdisciplinary approach. In this respect, participants confirmed their willingness to participate in other interdisciplinary fora in order to further explore the relevant issues pertaining to the contemporary role of religions in world affairs. In particular, the participants urged in their own ways for the unpacking of some of the rigid approaches and misconceptions that mar the study of religions. It was first of all considered as extremely urgent to challenge some popular misconceptions about religions

themselves, and to re-examine conceptions of secularisation in Europe. The study of Islam, that has suffered the most, needs to move beyond its monolithic treatment; nuanced analyses are needed that take into consideration primarily Islam's variations and through this realisation, highlight its positive contributions towards the attainment of international peace and stability. Similarly, studies on the involvement of religions in political affairs are due that move beyond the prevalent 'secularism versus religion' schema. Religions, in this respect, need to be rethought as potential partners in the search for democratic innovations. Along these lines, further research was thought to be required on the dynamic aspects of religions themselves. Studies that focus on institutional and theological transformations and which can help religions to meet with current global challenges.

### **Statistical information**

The workshop participation base hailed from various countries across Europe, representing a broad range of examples of Christian-Muslims relations, as well as a range of Christian dogmas and Muslim traditions. These countries included France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, Turkey, Greece and Switzerland. Taking into account the diversity of the participants' own backgrounds (beyond, that is, the counties in which they are currently based), the range extends to include Italy and Lebanon. The participant base also represented a broad range of disciplines, including history, political science, sociology, theology, law, and international relations. Meanwhile, the fields of activity of the participants are also very diverse, including journalism, academia, civil service, clergy, legal practice, and representation of non-governmental organisations. In terms of age brackets, participants ranged from the ages 20-30 (four); 30-40 (six); 40-50 (six), 50-60 (five), and 60-70 (two).



ESF/SCH Exploratory Workshop:  
**Christian-Muslim Relations in 21st Century Europe**  
Athens, Greece, 26-27 November 2004

## PROGRAMME

### Friday, 26 November 2004

17:00-17:30

Introductory remarks

**Dr. Thanos Dokos** Director of Studies, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Athens

**Keynote Address:**

**Christians and Muslims: Memory, Amity and Enmities**

**Dr. Tarek Mitri**, Coordinator of Interreligious Relations and Dialogue, World Council of Churches, Geneva

17:30-19:00

### **The Diversity of Muslim Collectivities in Europe East and West**

*Chair:*

**Prof. Antonis Manitakis**, Faculty of Law, University of Thessaloniki

Islamic communities in Western Europe, a state of flux

**Prof. Jorgen Nielsen**, Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations University of Birmingham

The Balkan Kaleidoscope: an introduction to Muslim communities in the Balkans

**Dr. Xavier Bougarel**, Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifiques, Paris

Living Islam in secularists' Turkey

**Prof. Haldun Gulalp**, Department of Sociology, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul

*Discussant:*

**Dr. Ilia Zaitsev**, Library of Foreign Literature, Moscow

19:00-19:15

*Coffee break*

19:15-20:30

### **Is there a European policy on religion?**

*Chair:*

**Ms. Sara Silvestri**, PhD Candidate, University of Cambridge, Centre of International Studies

The EU and minorities: policies and processes

**Dr. Dia Anagnostou**, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Athens

Rewriting our texts: education policies for a pluralistic Europe

**Prof. Thalia Dragonas**, Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Athens

*Discussant:*

**Prof. Grace Davie**, Reader in the Sociology of Religion, Exeter University

20:30

*Dinner*



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## Saturday, 27 November 2004

*Christian-Muslim relations in the Greek context: a critical introduction*

9:00-11:00

### **Managing difference: the changing religious landscape**

*Chair:*

**Prof. Nikos Kokosalakis**, Department of Social Morphology, Panteion University

Moving beyond the Church and nation framework in Orthodox Greece?

**Prof. Vasilios Makrides**, Department of Religious Studies, University of Erfurt

Mission in a multicultural society

**Dr. Thanasis Papathanasiou**, Editor of *Synaksi*

Providing interfaith and intercultural education

**Mr. Pandelis Kalaitzidis**, Pedagogical Institute Associate, Athens

Assimilating religion: mixed marriages and adult conversions

**Archimandrite Gregory Papathomas**, St.Serges Orthodox Institute, Paris

*Discussant:*

**Dr. Bruce Clark**, Editor, Religious affairs, *The Economist*

11:00-11:30

*Coffee break*

11:30-13:30

### **Legal and political dimensions of inter-religious relations**

*Chair:*

**Dr. George Kaminis**, Greek Ombudsman; Assistant Professor of Constitutional Law, University of Athens

Infringements of religious rights and freedoms

**Dr. Ioannis Ktistakis**, Lawyer; Expert on Human Rights, Athens

Orthodox perspectives on human rights

**Prof. Kostas Delikonstantis**, School of Theology, University of Athens

*Discussant:*

**Dr. Konstantinos Tsitselikis**, Centre for the Study of Minority Groups (KEMO), Faculty of Law, Democritus University

13:30-15:30

*Lunch*

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15:30-17:30

**Roundtable discussion**

*Chair:*

**Dr. Tarek Mitri**, Coordinator of Interreligious Relations and Dialogue, World Council of Churches, Geneva

*Discussants from each session are invited to present key points and policy recommendations, followed by an extended question and answer session*

*Coffee will be served during the Roundtable discussion*

**Closing remarks**

**Dr. Effie Fokas**, ELIAMEP Research Associate

20:00

*Closing dinner*

**Sunday, 28 November 2004**

Departure

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## List of Participants

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