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Inaugurating the newly reconstructed building of the French SCM, AEPP, SCM delegates from throughout Europe gathered for the European Regional Assembly of WSCF-E in Paris, France from 16-23 October 2007. Thematic inputs focusing on the topic of “Religion-Source of Peace or Violence” and statutory discussions planning for the next two years of WSCF-E activities filled the week, creating a stimulating forum for dialogue together.

To start off the week, in groups participants drew maps of Europe from memory. Through humorous discussions about the size of individual nations and border regions, the maps offered decoration for the week. Appetizer role-plays helped to initiate thematic discussions, leading into the inputs. Mr Elias El Halabi, the General Secretary of WSCF Middle East spoke of “Christian-Muslim Challenges and Misconceptions: WSCF ME Perspective.” Mr Norman Kember from the UK spoke on “The Challenge of Christian Peacemaking,” focusing on his experiences on a Christian Peacemakers Team in Iraq, where he was kidnapped for three months. From her time spent in the Middle East, Ms Nina Loimi from Finland spoke on the “Experiences of an Ecumenical Accompanier in Israel/Palestine.” Matthew Ross, from the Conference of European Churches (CEC), spoke on “Peace, Security, and Reconciliation”, focusing especially on the roles and situations of churches in reconciliation work in Northern Ireland. Georgiana Mihalache, WSCF-E Lingua Franca Coordinator, gave a presentation on the WCC campaign, “Decade to Overcome Violence” (DOV).

In addition, Rebecca Blocksme (BiH/HU/SL/USA), Siine Hoppner (DE), Lisa Westberg (SE), and Marco Fernerone (IT) led their fellow participants in a panel discussion entitled “Living in a multi-faith society” and focusing on the situations of their home contexts. Rachel Long (Serbia/USA) led a workshop entitled “Identity, Religion, and War in the Former Yugoslavia.” Jaanus Teose (SE) led a workshop examining ecumenisms approaches to difficult divisions, exploring how tense topics are (or are not) addressed. Zoya Franchuk (UA) and Natalka Vasilevich (BE) led a workshop on the relationship of the church and state in Ukraine and Belarus. Matthew Gardner’s (UK) workshop explored concepts of peace and violence in the Bible.

In addition, excursions to Paris and a night boat ride on the Seine gave participants time to explore outside the venue. After denominational worships in a nearby church and dinner, evenings were filled with intercultural presentations, a Movement Market, a French Cultural evening, and the film-screening of “Romero,” about the Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero who was killed for his peaceful stance against the government. The thematic portion of the conference was closed with the planting of an olive tree in the garden at the AEPP house, the venue. Participants held candles while two AEPP student residents played violins, and all sang Shalom Alechem while the peace tree was planted.

The statutory portion of the conference began with introductions, a report from the Chair, Alessia Passarelli (IT), and reports from the 2005-2007 ERC members. SCM delegates voted on proposed amendments to the WSCF-E bylaws, and in working groups drafted plans for the 2007-2009 Policy Paper. The Policy Paper was voted on by participants, and can be found (along with the by-laws) on the WSCF-E website at wscf-europe.org.

As a part of the statutory session, a new ERC was also elected. Jaanus Teose (SE) was elected as gender coordinator, Markus Sidoroff (FIN) as solidarity coordinator, Mirka Mytsak (CZ/UA) as theology coordinator, Matthew Gardner (UK) as treasurer, and Lenka Matuskova (SK) was re-elected as culture and higher education coordinator. Alessia Passarelli (IT), the chair, and Thorsten Roerbaek (DK), representative to the Executive Committee, remain on the ERC as their terms continue. Thorsten Roerbaek was re-elected as the vice-chair by the new ERC. Special thanks and official goodbyes were given to the 2005-2007 ERC, and to Hanna Tervanotko, the former regional secretary of the Europe region.

The conference ended with evaluations, closing worship, and a farewell party. Overall, conference created a safe forum to learn together and to plan for the future of WSCF-E.
