European Project for Interreligious Learning

Study Course IV 2015 - 2017
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Although interreligious learning and collaboration have been on the agenda in Europe for many decades, recent developments in the region have made such an approach more important than ever. The European Project for Interreligious Learning (EPIL) is based on the conviction that Christian and Muslim women working together have an important contribution to make.

On behalf of the Board of EPIL, I warmly welcome women from Turkey, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Netherlands participating in this fourth intensive study course on interreligious learning (2015-2017). Women from different countries from Europe and the Middle East have participated in the three pilot courses that took place since 2002. Having had three successful courses and many positive responses from participants and EPIL’s partners, the Board decided to launch this fourth course. EPIL is a unique process of learning through a carefully structured mix of academic input, live encounters with people and communities, training for learning form each other, and participation in each other’s religious and spiritual lives.

Our aim is to find new ways of living together peacefully and constructively in all our communities in Europe.

Sabiha Husić, M.Sc.
President
European Project for Interreligious Learning
Religion shapes people’s identities and influences relationships. Although religion has been a source of conflict in Europe for centuries, it has also inspired people to struggle for greater freedom, human dignity and emancipation. Even in modern Europe’s secular societies, religion continues to influence the formation of values, deeply held convictions and life styles.

Traditionally, Europe has seen itself as a Christian continent, obscuring the roles that Judaism and Islam played in its history. The religions of the Book have often been hostile to each other, and the memory of old tensions lingers, often fed by ignorance, fear and popular prejudice.

Meanwhile a new generation has come of age. They want to know how ‘integration’ and the common future will affect their lives. In order to answer that question, they must learn to perceive ethnicity, religion and culture both as sources of identity and vehicles for the recognition and respect of differences.
WHAT ARE EPIL’S GOALS?

EPIL is an educational process created to train students to understand and manage religious diversity in order to build equitable and peaceful communities. It focuses on Christian-Muslim relations and on the role of women in creating a culture of peace.

The project aims to:

- show how Islam and Christianity are ‘systems of being’ in the world
- explore the nature of religious freedom in the secular and democratic context of European societies
- build awareness of the historical role of Islam in Europe and the way memories shape today’s relationships in everyday life
- analyze conditions that may lead to the misuse of religion for non-religious purposes, and identify ways to avoid it
- develop a gender perspective, keeping the viewpoint and contributions of women in focus
- harness the potential of religion to create an everyday culture of peace and social harmony, and explore the role of women in this process
- contribute to overcoming violence and discrimination, and promote respect for human rights
- train students in proven methods of learning from each other, communication and conflict mediation
THE STUDY PLAN AT A GLANCE

MODULE I
October 17-23, 2015
Istanbul, Turkey

Identity Discrimination and Islamophobia

MODULE II - HOME COUNTRY MODULE
April, 2016 (3 days)
Towards a Pedagogy of Religious Diversity

MODULE III
October 1-7, 2016
Vienna, Austria

Historic Memories and Present Day Realities

MODULE IV
May 20-26, 2017
Sarajevo - Srebrenica - Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Justice and Reconciliation as a Contribution to Healing Processes

MODULE V
September 30 - October 6, 2017
Amsterdam, Netherlands

The Challenge of Migrant Communities – Revisiting Integration
The European Project for Interreligious Learning functions as a ‘roaming college’. It goes there where people have experienced problems and are searching for solutions.

MODULES

The five modules that make up the study course take place in four different locations in Europe. The methodology creates strong emotional and intellectual links between the issues discussed, the EPIL students exploring them and the local people living them. Networking thus becomes part of the process and enables the EPIL students to experience Europe as a living reality of great diversity.

LEARNING GROUPS

In addition to participating in the modules, each participant is required to become a member of a learning group that consists of students from the same city/region. Learning groups serve as a home base for participants. They meet in their own cities in between modules and organize their work with their respective facilitators. Participation in all modules, as well as in the learning groups, is compulsory.
MODULE I

Istanbul, October 17 – 23, 2015
Theme: **IDENTITY DISCRIMINATION AND ISLAMOPHOBIA**

**CONTENT:**

This module is the starting point of the two year course. In this week the group is brought together in order to form a learning community that will learn, live, travel and pray together. The students from various backgrounds, religions and ages get to know each other and themselves.

The module:
- offers training of methods of mutual interreligious learning and intercultural communication, practised throughout the entire study course; new insights are developed by listening, by assuming an attitude of empathy and by learning techniques that facilitate a change of perspective
- includes a seminar on basic religious issues, presented not as doctrinal statements but rather in the way they relate to women’s daily lives; the self-definition of the ‘other’ serves as the basis for further exploration
- introduces students to the situation of Muslims and Christians in Turkey
- highlights interactive learning initiatives of women of both faiths

**METHODOLOGY:**

The methodology is carefully designed to include theological and sociological approaches, encounters, peer-group learning and elements of celebration and spirituality. Students will be introduced to and trained in intercultural and interreligious communication. They will learn through experience, exposure, thinking and reflecting. Each student keeps a learning diary and will be part of a country group that will meet regularly for reflection.
LOCATION:
The group will be stationed in Istanbul, where they will work in an environment of both historical and contemporary sources of mutual interreligious learning.

FACILITATORS:
Dr. Emel Topcu, Associate Professor at Siirt University in Turkey. Since 2002, she has been active in field of human rights, women rights, minority-majority relationship, integration of migrants into European societies, multiculturalism and gender mainstreaming. Having lived in Germany for 15 years, she worked on many international and EU projects. Prior to her moving to Europe she was a scholar in India and the USA. She has worked and resided in Turkey since 2008. Dr. Topcu has been part of EPIL since 2002, as a student, Academic Team member and Board member.

Dr. Hicret Toprak, graduated from the Theology department of Ankara University, pursued her master’s and then PhD degree at the History department of Hacettepe University, on the subject of ‘DİYANET; in the Period of one party (1923-1945)’. Between 2004 and 2011 she worked with DİYANET and taught at Ahmet Yesevi University on the subject of ‘The knowledge of Yesevism’. Since 2011 she has been working as the director of KAGEM.

PARTNERS:
KAGEM (Women Family and Youth Center)

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MODULE III

Vienna, October 1 – 7, 2016
Theme: HISTORIC MEMORIES AND PRESENT DAY REALITIES

CONTENT:

The reflection on historic memories is intimately connected to the location where module II takes place; in Vienna memories of the Turkish sieges of the 16th and 17th centuries live on. Many public places are named in commemoration of these events. Today, however, relationships between the 'local people' and the Muslim migrant population are predominantly shaped by socio-economic factors. More and more the Muslim influences on food, music and fashion are becoming visible.

The module:

- introduces new research on the history of Christian-Muslim interactions in Central Europe. It explores where the memories come from: the negative experience of the Turkish sieges or the early positive recognition of Islam in the Austro-Hungarian Empire

- looks at specific fields of interaction in daily living. Family patterns, food, health and hygiene, dress codes, feasts, work, presence in the public space, art and music – these are areas marked by both cooperation and tension

METHODOLOGY:

The module practises interreligious learning and intercultural communication in a variety of ways: lectures, cultural presentations, ‘encounters’, sharing innovative practises, and doing things together in a neighbourly fashion, such as shopping for food and cooking.
Vienna has always been a meeting place of cultures, where people have developed their own way of integrating diverse elements into something new. More recently right-wing political trends have played on old prejudices against migrants. In this context, learning from each other has become important among the different religious communities.

**FACILITATORS:**

**Rev. Barbara Heyse-Schaefer**, MA, studied Protestant theology in Vienna, Tübingen and Berlin, with a focus on feminist theology and Jewish-Christian dialogue. She served as Protestant university pastor in Vienna and since 2003 she has been director of the Protestant Women's Agency of Austria. In this capacity she has been responsible for policy of women's programmes of the church. She has been president of the EPIL Board since 2011.

**Dr. Lise Jamila Abid**, studied Near Eastern/Islamic Studies and Communication Science at the University of Vienna. Embraced Islam in 1969. Since 1993 she has been a freelance journalist and since 2002 she has been a lecturer at the University of Vienna. Focus of interests and publications are women and gender studies, women in Islam, human rights and Islam, Islam and global ethics. In EPIL III (2011 - 2013) she was a member of the Vienna Academic Team.

**PARTNERS:**

Protestant Women’s Agency, ANIMA - Catholic Organization for Adult Education of Women, Catholic Women’s Movement of Austria, Association of Muslim Women’s Organizations in Austria

**CONTACT:**

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Tel: +43/14089605, E-mail: waltraut@klingt.org
MODULE IV
Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Zenica, May 20 – 26, 2017
Theme: JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION AS CONTRIBUTION TO HEALING PROCESSES

CONTENT:

For centuries Bosnia and Herzegovina nurtured traditions of tolerance, multi-ethnic living and ethical principles that value all cultures and religions. However, in the 1990s the country experienced a brutal conflict that divided people who had lived together peacefully for generations. This module focuses on how this was allowed to happen and how people are now rebuilding their lives and their country, and how survivors of war trauma and violence are living today and who and what are contributing to peace-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The module:

- introduces the history of Bosnia’s multi-ethnic nationalism; analyzes the historical background of its religious communities; and examines how religion has been used both to intensify conflict and to build peace
- analyzes what ‘respect for difference’ actually means and how it is necessary for the respect of human rights and the development of democracy
- explores efforts (especially those of women) in post-conflict healing and commitment to exercising justice for survivors in the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina

METHODOLOGY:

Through testimonies of women’s experiences, lectures and roundtable discussions, participants analyze the complex situation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Examples of good practise illustrate efforts and methodologies for healing and reconstruction. The module includes visits to various sites with rich cultural and religious values but also visits to the sites where genocide and mass suffering have happened.
LOCATION:

Sarajevo provides a rich blend of the religions and cultures that shaped its past. The module includes visits to Srebrenica, a site where genocide has happened, and to Zenica, a town known for great efforts in peacebuilding and reconciliation.

FACILITATORS:

Irma Šiljak, has been working in the Association "Medica" Zenica since 2008. She graduated from the Pedagogical Faculty in Zenica, English language and Literature Department, and is currently involved in the ‘European studies’ master degree course at the University of Sarajevo. Šiljak was an EPIL student during the 2011-2013 course. Her final paper topic was ‘Youth in interreligious dialogue - their perceptions of religion with a focus on violence’.

Jadranka Miličević, is a peacebuilder, feminist and activist for human and women’s rights. She is a co-founder and executive director of CURE Foundation in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. She is a member of International Peace Network “Women in Black” and a winner of the 100 Heroins of the World Award. She works at the CARE International Balkans and is responsible for regional project on ‘Active inclusion and rights of Roma women in Western Balkans’.

PARTNERS:

Association Medica Zenica in cooperation with religious communities and nongovernmental organizations

CONTACT:

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METHODOLOGY:

The module emphasizes the ‘encounter’ method of learning. Problems are analyzed by interacting with people at all levels of society (civic and religious authorities, people directly affected by the problem, etc.) and by learning to look at the issue from various perspectives. To achieve this, the module introduces a variety of creative didactic methods.

CONTENT:

Human history is a history of migration. Over the ages, danger, need and curiosity have prompted people to leave their countries of origin in search of security, livelihood and fulfilment. Many also migrated for religious reasons; the journey without return is a deep religious symbol that can be found in both the Bible and the Qur’an. Today sizeable communities of Muslim migrants live in many European countries. How do they deal with living in societies where many of the norms are different from those they are familiar with, from their own religious and cultural backgrounds? How can they become active and accepted citizens of this new homeland without losing their heritage?

The module:
- analyzes why people migrate and how host communities react to them
- includes study and interpretation of stories of migration in the holy books
- fosters understanding of the difficulties of developing concepts of integration
- explores new ways of dealing with cultural and religious differences.

MODULE V

Amsterdam, September 30—October 6, 2017
Theme: **THE CHALLENGE OF MIGRANT COMMUNITIES - REVISITING INTEGRATION**
LOCATION:
The module explores new initiatives and models of integration in the Netherlands. The group stays in the Dominican Priory in Huissen, and from there it visits migrant communities and projects in Amsterdam and other cities, which are home to people of many different cultures and religions. There will also be an encounter with women from the Jewish community.

FACILITATORS:

Dr. Geertje de Vries, studied Theology at the Kampen Theological University. She worked as an ordained minister in the Protestant Church for nine years, and in 2008 she defended her PhD thesis on subject of 'Learning to see – learning to believe. A practical-theological theory of aesthetic-religious learning'. In 2008 - 2013, De Vries worked as a lecturer at the department of Theology and Life Philosophy at Inholland University in Amstelveen. Presently she works as a minister again, in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.

Dr. Stella van de Wetering, currently works as a lecturer at VU University, Faculty of Theology, Cantre of Islamic Theology (CIT) and Inholland University Amsterdam, Department Education, Learning and Life Philosophy at the Teacher Training Program for Teachers Islam. Wetering graduated in Arabic language and Arabic Islamic culture. Her field of expertise is Arabic language, Gender and Islamic Theology, Islamic Pedagogy, Islamic Education and Interreligious Dialogue.

PARTNERS:
Dominican Research Centre for Theology and Society (DSTS), Dominikanenklooster Huissen, Oecumenische Vrouwensynode (Organization of Christian Women), Al Nisa (Organization of Muslim Women), VU University Amsterdam, Inholland University Amsterdam.

CONTACT:
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WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS?
High-school diploma plus professional training and/or three years of work experience (including in the home); or University or equivalent education.

LANGUAGES
The modules are conducted in the language of the country and in English. A working knowledge of English is required. Some modules include preparatory language training. Learning groups work in the language of their country. Diploma work is written in the language of the students’ own country in which it is submitted.

HOME COUNTRY MODULE
Module II is a home country module and it will be held in home countries in April 2016. Students from each of the participating countries will gather for three days and work on EPIL’s new book “Towards a Pedagogy of Religious Diversity”. They will have an opportunity to practice new knowledge and skills, and deepen their mutual cooperation and understanding.
CREDIT/ DIPLOMA
To obtain a diploma, a student is required to follow the entire course and submit a diploma work or project. The diploma is awarded by EPIL.

WHAT ARE THE FEES?
Students pay according to their financial situation, taking into account prevailing national economic conditions.

SCHOLARSHIPS
EPIL offers a limited number of partial scholarships. Please enquire with your national contact.

REGISTRATION
Applications for registration should be sent to the national contact address, by the date indicated by applicants’ national facilitator, but not later than June 26, 2015.

INTERNATIONAL COORDINATION
More information is available from EPIL's international coordinator:
Halima Husić, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
e-mail: halima.husic@hotmail.com
Or on EPIL website: www.epil.ch
GALLERY
Learn to Live in a Multifaith Europe
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