



Communiqué of the Graz Process Meeting in Sofia 2012

From October 17-21, 2012, representatives from theological faculties and church theological departments located in seven different countries met at the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia. This academic consultation meeting was organized by the Coordination Office of the Graz Process located at the Catholic Theological Faculty of the Karl-Franzens University of Graz/Austria (<http://www.uni-graz.at/grazerprozess/>).

Among the participants were members of faculties involved in the Graz Process, such as Prof. Dr. Hans-Ferdinand Angel (dean of the Catholic Theological Faculty, Karl-Franzens University, Graz/Austria), Prof. Dr. Pablo Argárate (Karl-Franzens University, Graz/Austria), Prof. Dr. Ivan Zhelev Dimitrov (St. Kliment Ochridski University, Sofia/ Bulgaria), Prof. Dr. Vidar Haanes (Rector of MF Norwegian School of Theology, Oslo/Norway), Dr. Annette Mosher (VU University Amsterdam/Netherlands), Prof. Dr. Dorin Oancea (Lucia Blaga University Sibiu/Rumania), Prof. Dr. Archim. Grigorios Papathomas (President of EFOST, Athens/Greece), Benjamin Prabitz (manager of the Coordination Office of the Graz Process, Karl-Franzens University, Graz/Austria).

Prof. DDr. Grigorios Larentzakis (Head of the Coordination Office of the Graz Process, Karl-Franzens University, Graz/Austria), who at short notice had to attend the anniversary celebrations of the late Metropolitan Michael Staikos (Vienna), contributed a written statement.

Special guests were Bishop Andrej (Cilerdzic) of Remesiana, appointed by the Holy Synod as the official delegate of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Prof. Dr. Joseph Marko, dean of the Faculty of Law, Karl-Franzens University, Graz/Austria, and Florian Tuder, general secretary of Pro Oriente, Vienna/Austria.

The Centre for the Study of Religions at the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia hosted the conference, which took place in the official hall of the academic council of Sofia University and was opened by Vice-Rector Prof. Dr. Milena Stefanova, Prof. Dr. Plamen Makariev, Vice-Director of the Centre for the Study of Religions, who also presented the first session, and Prof. Dr. Bozhidar Andonov, Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Theology.

The major aim of the Graz Process is to support structural cooperation of all theological faculties and higher schools of religious education in Europe by strengthening inter-confessional and inter-denominational exchange and communication with a focus on the topic of tolerance. Therefore, the Graz Process welcomes and supports the impressive initiative of His Holiness Irinej, patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, concerning the 1700 year anniversary celebrations in 2013.

The year 313 marked a turning point in the history of the Roman Empire, when Constantine and Licinius declared the right to worship any god (*liberis mentibus* - with free minds). The appointment speech of His Holiness as protector of Pro Oriente in Vienna (10.9.2010) addressed issues of tolerance and cooperation and provided the incentive for the meeting in Sofia and determined the choice of topic ("Tolerance within the Churches – Tolerance Supported by the Churches").

One of the aims of the conference was to reflect and support the initiative for the anniversary celebration in 2013. Participants discussed the impact this crucial event of the year 313 had on the churches and their role in modern society from theological, psychological, historical, sociological, and legal perspectives:

- Psychodynamics of Tolerance: The Role of Creditions (Angel).
- Is Tolerance a Dangerous Ethic? (Mosher).
- Tolerance between Religions? An Early Theological Report on Islam in the Eighth Century (Argárate).

- The Orthodox Church in Bulgaria and Other Religions in Bulgaria (Dimitrov).
- Pro Oriente: Impulses for Tolerance and Understanding (Tuder).
- Constantine Revisited: Tolerance Then and Today (Haanes).
- The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Anniversary 2013 (Bishop Andrej).
- Equality and Plurality: Tolerance or Law (Marko).
- Tolerance as Communion with the Known and Unknown Christ (Oancea).
- Was the Capital of the Roman Empire or the Byzantine Empire Founded by Emperor Constantine? How Did This Impact the Relations between East and West?" (paper by Larentzakis, presented by Angel).

The conference included an interreligious meeting with representatives of the National Council of Religions in Bulgaria, held in the New Jewish Centre "Beth Shalom" in Sofia, where cooperation projects between the different Bulgarian religious communities were presented.

One of the spiritual highlights of the conference was the pilgrimage to the Rila Monastery, where conference participants celebrated the liturgy in honour of Saint Iwan Rilski, which was followed by an invitation to lunch by His Grace Bishop Evlogiy, the abbot of the Rila Monastery.

Conference participants articulated their explicit support of the initiative of His Holiness Irinej, which was seen as a theological and spiritual impulse of high importance. The participants stressed the need of such a voice of tolerance, understanding, and forgiveness in a time of deep crisis. They expressed their hope that the celebrations of the 1700 year anniversary of the "Edict of Milan" in the city of Nis, the birth town of Constantine and the former bishop seat of His Holiness, will encourage people to open their hearts for divine grace and to follow the path of peace and reconciliation.

Sofia, 21st of October 2012