



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
Secretariat**

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ENGLISH only

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**Conference Services**

Please find attached the presentation by Mr. Jozef de Witte, Director, Centre for Equal Opportunities and Oppositions to Racism, Belgium, made at session III of the OSCE Tolerance Implementation Meeting on Promoting Inter-Cultural, Inter-Religious and Inter-Ethnic Understanding, Almaty 12 – 13 June 2006.

OSCE Tolerance Implementation Meeting  
Almaty, 12-13 June 2006

## The Commission for the Intercultural Dialogue

The Belgian initiative to promote intercultural,  
inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue

Jozef De Witte  
Director

Centre for equal opportunities and opposition to racism

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Almaty - 12&13 June 2006

## Outline

A. The Centre for equal opportunities and  
opposition to racism (CEOOR)

B. I.D.: Background and methodology

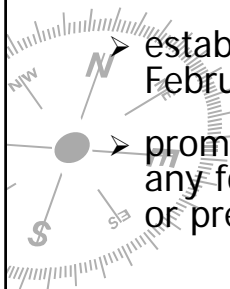
C. I.D.: Results

D. I.D.: Lessons learned

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## A. The Centre for equal opportunities and opposition to racism (CEOOR)


*A public service, independent in its work:*

- 
- established by an Act of Parliament on 15 February 1993
  - promoting equal opportunities and fighting any form of distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference

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## Missions

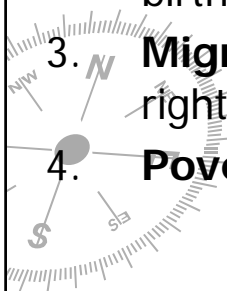
1. A place for **victims** and witnesses of racism and discrimination
2. Consultations, surveys, **studies**, ...
3. Information, **sensibilisation**, training, ...
4. **Recommendations** to public and private authorities



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## Departments

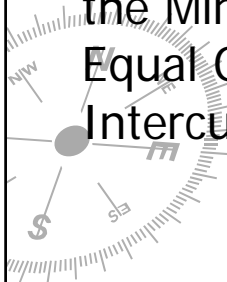
1. **Racism** and racial discrimination
2. **Non-racial discrimination**: disability, age, sexual preference, health, fortune, birth, civil state, ...
3. **Migration**: information on migration, rights of foreigners, human trafficking
4. **Poverty** in Belgium



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## B. I.D.: Background & Methodology

- Establishment Commission Intercultural Dialogue on 23.02.04 (until 02.05.05)
- Initiative of the Federal Government, the Minister for Social Integration, Equal Opportunities and Interculturalism



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## Background

- Cultural diversity => source of enrichment (creativity and innovation in business, culture, ...), but also conflict (racial violence, cf. the recent murders in Antwerp)
- Outcome: concrete recommendations on how to deal with intercultural conflict and identification of good practices

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## Composition of Commission

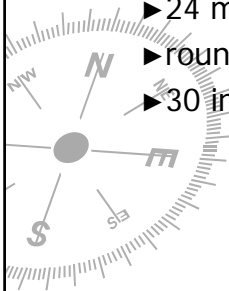
- 27 members
  - ▶ representing the cultural/linguistic and political pluralism of the country
  - ▶ attention to the gender dimension
  - ▶ diverse background:
    - religious and non-religious background
    - native Belgians as well as Belgians of other ethnic origins
    - different professional backgrounds

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# Methodology

## - Different activities:

- ▶ 33 plenary sessions, consisting of Commission members and 68 experts
- ▶ technical, staff and office meetings
- ▶ 24 meetings, organised by 4 working groups
- ▶ round tables, consisting of a total of 90 witnesses
- ▶ 30 interviews

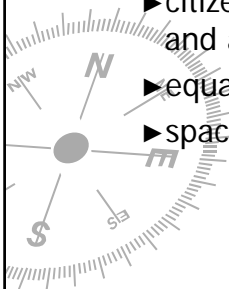


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# Methodology

## - Preparatory work carried out by 4 working groups, staff members of CEOOR in the areas of:

- ▶ the fundamental principles of public services: equality, non-discrimination and neutrality
- ▶ citizenship as a remedy against fear for the other and an inward-looking attitude
- ▶ equality between men and women
- ▶ space and recognition of religious beliefs

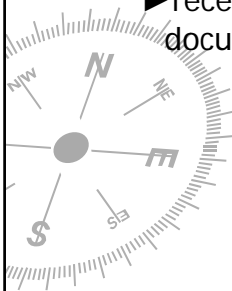


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# Methodology

## - Feedback

- ▶ website with a discussion forum  
[www.intercultureledialogo.be](http://www.intercultureledialogo.be)
  - this site is still active and used in schools
- ▶ received more than 100 memo's and a series of documents concerning specific issues

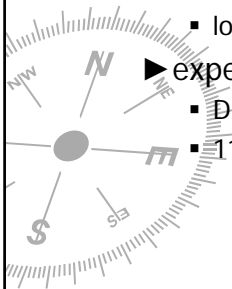


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# Methodology

## - Role of CEOOR in Intercultural Dialogue

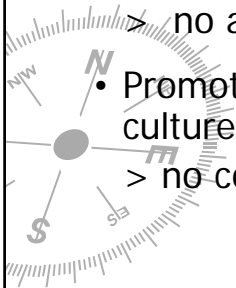
- ▶ organisational:
  - Director and deputy directors present in the different meetings
  - 2 administrative staff members
  - logistical support of the different activities
- ▶ expertise in the different subjects of the ID:
  - Director and Deputy Director
  - 11 staff members (cf. the 4 working groups)



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## C. I.D.: Results

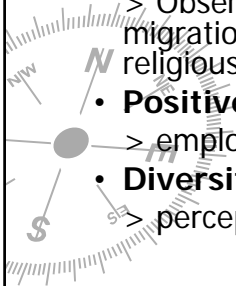
- A clear choice for a double fundamental political principle:
  - Recognition of the **cultural diversity**, with respect and dignity for each minority
    - > no assimilation
  - Promotion of **interaction** and mixture of cultures, promotion of multiple identities
    - > no communitarism



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## Results

- 4 types of recommendations:
  - **Symbolic**
    - > charter of citizenship; citizenship ceremony, public holidays; ...
  - **Institutional** tools for policy implementation purposes:
    - > Observatory for migration and minorities; Museum for migration; Belgian Islamic Institute; Belgian Inter-religious Institute; ...
  - **Positive action** measures:
    - > employment; housing; education; public services; ...
  - **Diversity** policies:
    - > perceptions; languages; schools; ...



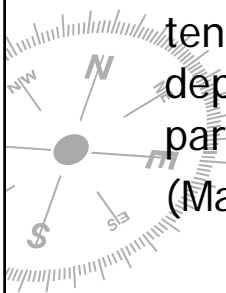
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## A witness on the dialogue of cultures

" A person is a mosaic. I am East-Fleming, I am also Jewish, I am Fleming, I am Belgian, I don't have a double nationality. My loyalty goes to ten issues, of which the priority depends on the place I am at that particular moment."

(Marc)

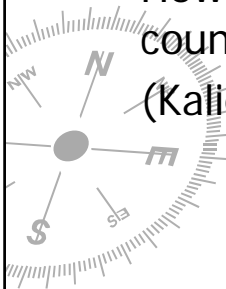


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## A witness on integration

" I love my country (of origin) very much. If I had the opportunity I would return. However, I will not live there since my country is here (in Belgium). "

(Katie)

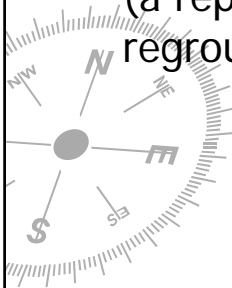


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## A witness on sharing citizenship

“ Our word is no longer ‘integration’ but rather ‘participation as citizen’. ”

(a representative of an organisation regrouping people from Black Africa)

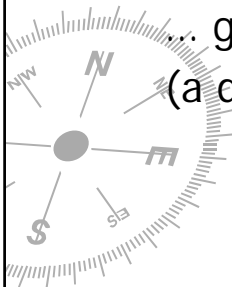


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## A witness on positive action and the fight against discrimination

“ We work on the quality hoping it would have an impact on the quantity. But indeed (this process) moves very slowly given the urgency of the problem.”

(a diversity advisor)

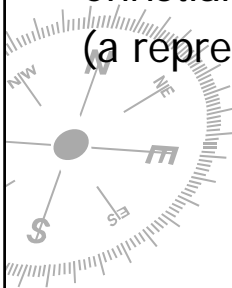


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## A witness on Culture and Diversity

" I dream of praying houses, where Jews pray on Saturdays, Muslims on Fridays and Christians on Sundays. "

(a representative of a Muslim organisation)

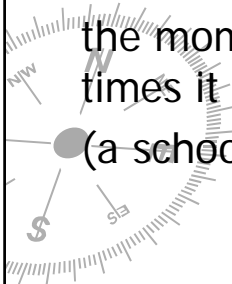


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## A witness on interculturalism in schools

" I received parents of pupils of Turkish origin, who called me racist because their children did not pass the exams. That was the moment to start a dialogue, although at times it was not easy."

(a school director)



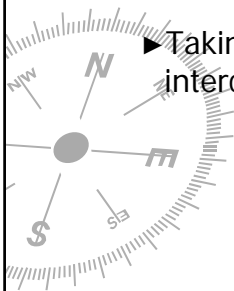
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## D. I.D.: Lessons learned

### - Positive

- ▶ Bringing together a wide range of actors from different backgrounds in one initiative

- ▶ Taking the time to reflect on a complex issue such as interculturalism



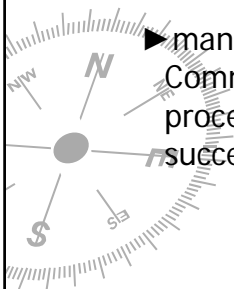
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## Lessons learned

### - Negative:

- ▶ full co-operation between the different governments is an ideal, not a reality

- ▶ managing diversity among the different actors in the Commission and beyond is in itself a learning process, a permanent challenge, with no instant success formula



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## Conclusions

- ▶ No pathos, but an intelligent and positive emotional approach
- ▶ A pragmatic approach, looking for solutions, rather than principles only
- ▶ Promotion of conflict prevention and de-escalation
- ▶ Complex situations require complex answers, and more than one answer is possible

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