

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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pour le Réarmement moral

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Caux, 17.07.00

Dear friends,

The sun is shining and the skies are blue, as we move into the third week of the conference season in Caux. Here in the third floor offices, where I am typing this letter, there is a combination of contented sighs being let out after the end of one conference, and a quiet buzz of anticipation and preparation for the next session, entitled 'Aims and Values for the New Century', which begins this evening.

The conference entitled 'Foundations for Freedom, East and West', which has just finished, was a watershed conference because of the balance of people from Eastern and Western Europe alike. Its planning, co-ordination and execution was for the first time carried by equal numbers from both groups, and if anything it was the people from the West who were under-represented. It was amazing and at the same time very moving to see the number of young people from Russia, Moldova and Ukraine who are prepared to take MRA to their countries.

Of course this new balance brought a fresh set of challenges to the organisation of the conferences, which were not helped by problems in communication during the pre-planning and problems with visas that delayed many people's arrival. Earlier in the week there were feelings that instead of a true dialogue, there were two separate monologues from each side. In the evaluation after the conference, however, it was felt that there had been genuine moves towards a dialogue by the two sides.

Obviously the 'Foundations for Freedom' week has been a learning process, which is still in its early stages. But already there is a widespread desire to hold such a week again in the near future, and on an expanded basis. As one of the conference organisers observed, 'humanly and logically we shouldn't have done it, but thank God we did!'

Again, much credit has to go to the 14 strong group from Moldova. They organised many of the morning workshops on topics which included collectivism versus individualism and the role of tolerance in modern society. As well as these workshops they have continued to serve the house by taking on cooking and service shifts amongst other things. We are very fortunate to have them stay here for at least three weeks more.

As well as this dialogue between East and West, the core message and values of MRA were presented in a new light during the *Point Fixe* slots at the start of each day. Edward Peters from Great Britain introduced the

concept of the four standards being points on an inner compass, with God at the centre, and throughout the week people gave practical reflections on the importance of each point to them.

The mood of the conference was summed up during the final meeting by Irina Iazykova, a Russian professor of art history and a specialist on icons. She said that the longest road in Europe was not from the East to the West or vice versa, but was 'the journey from our heads to our hearts', and that Caux and MRA had found a way to shorten that road. She treated us to a very impressive illustrated talk on Russian icons, likening the imagery in Andrei Rubler's famous icon *The Trinity* (which contains four basic sections) to the inner compass and the four standards.

Another symbol of the dialogue between East and West was the cultural dancing evening, which included Moldovan and Australian dances as well as the usual assortment from Scotland. I'll never forget the sight of about 100 people hopping around like kangaroos in two circles during one particular antipodean dance.

Parallel to the main conferences, the *Caux Scholars Program* started last Wednesday, and will last for four weeks. The group this year is made up of people from very varied backgrounds, from Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans, America and Britain, and each of them comes to the programme with a high level of personal motivation.

Finally, it would be inaccurate to describe the weather during the last week as anything less than utterly miserable. I don't think I have ever experienced such a prolonged period of cloud and drizzle, which has kept most of us (apart from the truly crazy people who still insist on playing football) rooted firmly indoors. Happily this is all set to change, we are told. Yesterday we saw the first Para gliders of the season, a sure sign no doubt of good things to come.

Yours sincerely,

John Everington