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CER and RCE

Having been a member in the past of the standing committee of the CER for over 15 years and today a member of the RCE presidium, I feel it is important to correct a number of factual errors in Alex Strom's latest column (*Another Stream* 28th November).

1. The Conference of European Rabbis was founded in 1957 by the late Chief Rabbi Schuster z"l of Amsterdam. It was only a number of years later that Chief Rabbi Brodie was elected in his place and eventually when Rabbi Jakobovits came back to this country, after a number of years away, he was elected in Chief Rabbi Brodie's place, a position he held for 25 years when he passed away.

2. The goal of the CER was to rebuild Yiddishkeit in Europe after WW2 and it did an admirable job of promoting real Yiddishkeit. However, the Chareidi Rabbonim such as Rabbi Munk z"l eventually left it because it became identified as more tolerant, middle of the road Orthodoxy. I remember at the first conference I attended I sat next to a Neolog Rabbi called Schweitzer and I was very surprised that he was part of the group, but that's how the conference was.

3. The conference acted to promote collegiality among the Rabbonim and to provide a Daas Torah for a middle-road Orthodoxy on matters of Yiddishkeit. It's Rabbonim are a mixture of traditional Rabbonim and Modern Orthodox Rabbonim.

4. The Beis Din of the conference of the CER was established in 1997 by Dayan Berkowitz z"l, who arranged the gittin all over Europe at that time. It was with the petirah of Dayan Berkowitz z"l in 2005 that Dayan Ehrentreu was appointed in his place and began doing conversions also. The CER has its own kashrus division, ECK, which runs shechitos in Romania among other things. It has had some involvement in mikva'os in

Europe but the bulk of mikva'os in Europe have been built by the RCE, not the CER.

5. The RCE was founded in 2000 by many Rabbonim (a large contingent of Chabad Rabbonim, but others too) in efforts to assist all young Rabbonim all over Europe. The organisation would provide a totally different service than the CER. It is primarily a support service to the Rabbonim in Europe and engages only minimally in hosting non-Jewish dignitaries. I know this because I have been a member of both; in the CER I was on the standing committee and in the RCE I am a member of the presidium. The RCE have met with all the Gedolim in Eretz Yisroel who have encouraged them and supported them in their work. The organisation was not opened as a rival organisation, but as an organisation to focus more on work which the CER didn't do.

6. Mr Strom has forgotten the most important person in the CER and that was Rabbi Avrohom Rose z"l, who ran the organisation for almost 50 years. The late Aba Dunner z"l, who first was his assistant and later became the director himself, continued Rabbi Rose's good work, but proper credit must be given to the man who worked tirelessly and leshem Shomayim for almost 50 years.

I felt it necessary to set the record straight on these matters.

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and fund. In cooperation with the local communities and with European and other international Jewish organisations, the CER steps into the breach to defend our freedom of religion, particularly when Milah, Shechita and the ability to provide Jewish education are concerned. We provide a pan-European helping hand to local communities in fighting against anti-Semitism. We also work to protect our communities' members and future members. Just last week, following years of work, we came to a historic agreement with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, which will help ensure that Europeans seeking conversion to Judaism will have a chance to be guided and shepherded by their local communities, converted in a European Beis Din, and be recognised in Israel and throughout the world. The Chief Rabbinate of Israel agreed no longer to allow its dayanim to form ad hoc roving botei din, agreed to recognise botei din throughout Europe, which are being established under the guidance

of Dayan Ehrentreu and the European Beis Din. In line with previous policy, the CER affirmed its opposition to long distance giyurim performed either by roving dayanim or during brief visits in Israel. Through the reaffirmation of that policy, we want to ensure that no convert ends up in a beis din that will provide him with a certificate that will be doubted in many other communities. Twice a year our Standing Committee meets to discuss the important issues of the day. At our most recent meeting in Yerusholayim, we met with the President of the State of Israel and numerous members of Knesset to make them aware of the problems of persistent anti-Semitism in Europe. During our visit to Israel, we also met with Rav Chaim Kanievisky, Rav Gershon Edelstein and other gedolim, and sought both their blessing and their counsel.

than perhaps at any stage in its past. Please G-d, we shall continue to work for the klal.
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The Jewish world is blessed by a multiplicity of organisations, including, as the joke goes, the shul or you, he or she wouldn't set foot in. Most of those organisations do very worthy work, and some of them are indispensable. One of the indispensable organisations is the Conference of European Rabbis.

Despite the word Conference in its name, the CER isn't just "a talking shop," though that would be worthwhile. Unlike what was claimed in these pages by another author, the value of meetings isn't in overcoming any existential loneliness that could stem from being a group of Chareidim detached from the Modern Orthodox / United Synagogue / Consistoire type of laity we live and work amongst. Actually, the CER Rabbonim are highly idealistic and connect well with their congregants across any real or imagined socio-religious chasms. No, instead, our meetings allow us to find strength in numbers to do the very opposite, to discuss the challenges facing our communities and to work together to address those challenges.

Any loneliness some or many of the CER members may face stems from the fact that a significant number of members serve in isolated Jewish communities with limited Jewish infrastructure, which CER members painstakingly labour in coordination with their lay leaders to build up. In this area, the CER provides and facilitates start-up funding to financially less well-off communities.

But the CER does more than meet, talk

The CER is more relevant and active today

