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Speech Anthea Cox

Re British Churches' submission on CEC CSC work programme

The Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Church of England's House of Bishops' Europe Panel, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, responded together to the draft work programme of the Church and Society Commission. Although the submission focused on CEC CSC, its analysis could be applied to any of the Commissions and the churches were not signalling out CEC CSC for special treatment.

The churches were mindful of the growing pressures faced by member churches from Britain, the tendency for financial retrenchment leading to a re-examination of existing priorities as well as methods of working. And this was against the backdrop of the global financial crisis and the reality of a significant economic downturn across Europe.

The churches in Britain want to stress the importance they see in CEC through its Church and Society Commission enabling them to engage with social and political issues. The CSC is seen as being an essential resource for the churches in this regard. Three concerns that were considered in the preparation of the paper were

- the overwhelming number of issues, that seemed to be increasingly expanding, placing considerable demands on the staff and resources
- the need to support churches' own decision making in response to debate and the problematic nature of an ecumenical body trying to represent the diversity of the CEC member churches in European Dialogue and the European Institutions.
- the lack of strategic direction flagged up by the submission is itself reflective of a lack of organisational cohesion in CEC as a whole that is marked by a multiplicity of competing decision-making bodies that encourages working practices that are neither transparent nor predictable.

Important to the British Churches were partnerships built on consultation and participation. Initiatives taken by the CSC need the full and active involvement of Member Churches. Ecumenical dialogue on 'Church and Society' matters must reach beyond the Brussels-based political debate into a full-blown European Ecumenical Public Space that helps to create understanding and respect for each others traditions, identity and thinking.



The British Churches agree that the proposed CSC work programme focuses on the questions, ‘What is CEC CSC best placed to do’ and ‘what can be better done by individual Member Churches’.

The British Churches in their submission therefore suggested four strategic objectives for the Church and Society Commission to approach its work:

Developing CEC CSC as a EU and Pan-European Public Affairs Resource for its Member Churches

For many Member Churches, being kept informed of legislative developments in Europe is a core priority. CEC CSC is well placed to provide a whole range of public affairs services to better link its Member Churches with the decision-making centres of the European Union.

Developing CEC CSC as a European Ecumenical Think-Tank

It is important to the British Churches that the work be underpinned by theological and ethical reflection. Developing CEC CSC as the premier source of ecumenical analysis, informed Christian debate and influential ideas on how to build a values-based Europe, should be a key strategic objective for the next 5 years.

Developing CEC CSC as a capacity-building resource for its Member Churches

The resourcing of Member Churches is a vital role for the CSC. This may be expressed in terms of enabling shared reflection to take place, strengthening member engagement, providing specific support, or helping individual members to develop their own strategies.

Developing CEC CSC as a model for new organisational relationships

In Britain there has been a significant change in the ecumenical architecture with some churches significantly reducing their financial support to ecumenical bodies, whilst at the same time new and more organic ecumenical partnerships have developed. As churches we need to be alert and actively work at finding new ways in which the voices of the churches contribute to debates in the public sphere. CEC CSC needs to recognise and work with such shifts in order that its work meets and serves the aspirations of the Member Churches. To achieve these priorities it is vital that the organisational culture and structure of CEC changes and responds.