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Assembly Policy Reference Report

Living and Acting together as Churches in Europe Future Perspectives for the work of CEC

SECTION I

Background and Methodology

The methodology that the Policy Reference Committee used to fulfil its constitutional responsibilities has been determined in part by the thinking set out by the report produced by the Initial Policy Reference Committee. This report reflected the common trend in the responses from member churches that CEC urgently needs to adopt a more strategic, focused approach to its work. As a result, the draft report presented to the Assembly reflected the premise that any report adopted by the Assembly ought to restrict itself to offering main policy lines for CEC in the years ahead. The Policy Reference Committee accepted this premise as being consistent with the Assembly's subsequent deliberations. It follows, therefore, that rather than offering an exhaustive list of issues to be addressed by CEC, the report should provide a non-prescriptive policy framework to assist the Central Committee in agreeing strategic objectives based on the main policy lines set out by the Assembly. This report is intended to guide the Central Committee when it makes decisions following the Assembly. It is also offered as an "aide memoire" to the Constitutional Committee set up by this Assembly as a faithful reflection of the Assembly's deliberations.

Equipped with this methodology, the PRC listened to the voices expressed during the Assembly in its various plenaries and group activities. The following thematic issues were addressed during the Assembly:

- *dialogue with the European institutions*
- *social justice in Europe*
- *human rights and religious freedom*
- *globalisation*
- *mission*
- *spirituality*
- *hope for unity*
- *unifying in diversity - being church together with migrant, black and ethnic minority churches*
- *hope for justice - protecting refugees in Europe in the 21st century*



- *faithful investments - churches and responsible investments*
- *CEC's place in the ecumenical movement*
- *CEC as a platform for dialogue with other Christian churches and other faith communities*
- *arms trade*
- *migration in a changing ecclesial landscape in Europe*
- *human enhancement and new technologies*
- *Europe in relation to other continents*
- *gender stereotypes in Church and society*
- *churches and climate change*
- *communication strategy*
- *nuclear non-proliferation*
- *Christian education*
- *persecution of Christians*
- *conflicts between States where CEC member churches are living*
- *elderly people*
- *people with disabilities*

These issues will be addressed by the Central Committee and the Commissions according to the following policy lines as set out in Section II - Report. This report does not determine which of these issues will be prioritized. This will be the task of the relevant bodies of CEC. It is noted, that some of these issues have already found visible expression through the documentation provided by the Message Committee, Public Issues Committee and the Presentation from the Youth Delegates "Hand in Hand".



SECTION II

Report

The major challenge: Longing for unity – experiencing diversity

Europe in the year 2009 is facing ongoing and new challenges arising from diversity. The plurality of its nations, languages, cultures and religious traditions continues to increase as people from within and from outside Europe feel constrained to move away from their home countries. Thus migrants from different contexts have brought their original cultures, traditions and religions to their new homes in Europe. The art of living together in peace and justice as citizens with differing religious identities is in many respects, still to be developed and practised. This is as true for Europe as a whole as it is true for each country within Europe. Diversity means richness, but at the same time it can be used as a reason for injustice, rivalry and conflict.

Therefore – and not only because of political and economic motives – the longing for unity is crucial to Europe. It can be described as the hope for fellowship, for a community which is able to absorb and integrate diversity, differences, even conflict, so that mutual respect, justice and peace may be achieved.

With the 13th Assembly, the churches in Europe have come together in Lyon to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). Out of the ruins of World War II and their then subsequent separation in hostile national political systems, the churches understood that they had the unique opportunity of building bridges between their different confessions and traditions. At the same time their coming together in the fellowship of CEC can be understood as symbolizing hope for a Europe where people would learn about reconciliation and peace, to live together as good neighbours and eventually to recognize themselves to be sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ.

With gratitude we therefore recall the positive role that churches – and CEC – were able to play in the processes of reconciliation, in democratic movements, as bridge-builders and contributors to the removal of the iron curtain. With pleasure we heard from politicians at the Third European Ecumenical Assembly acknowledge the important role that churches have played and continue to play in the process of the growing together of Europe.

It is true that the churches themselves still have to explore how their common experience within CEC can help them walk together on a common way, giving a common witness to the one hope in Jesus Christ. Despite all visible diversity the longing for “visible unity” seems to be a hope which is still on the agenda. However, it has also lost part of its strength as a result of the problems and conflicts which have sometimes been hard to deal with in the fellowship and the work of CEC. Nevertheless mission is a challenge for all member churches and for CEC itself. The more the common witness of CEC becomes visible, the more CEC fulfils its vocation.



“Called to One Hope in Christ” – the ecumenical journey

CEC member churches have shared the experience of their ecumenical journey over the last 50 years. Despite their different traditions and confessions they have paved ways for dialogue, for mutual understanding and for common witness and action. During the years from Trondheim to Lyon hopes and obstacles in equal measure have shaped the ecumenical landscape both within and outside CEC.

“Called to One Hope in Christ” - the theme which titles and accompanies the 13th Assembly of CEC - reminds all Christian Churches of their common origin in Jesus Christ. Yet this theme is not only a reminder, but it also calls each church and the fellowship of churches in CEC to live out this indivisible hope and to give witness to unity, even at times when this seems to be a goal far away from day-by-day experience. Nevertheless the different theological concepts of “unity in reconciled diversity” and “visible unity” must not be seen as being in contradiction to each other. They should be brought into dialogue.

As far as the ecumenical dialogue with other Church families is concerned it remains a challenge for CEC to identify its specific role. One question within this matter is how CEC could make better use of the results of the various bilateral dialogues. The Charta Oecumenica remains for CEC the basic document for ecumenical dialogue in Europe.

In our Christian perspective hope is related very closely to faith. In the Bible we find the ground and the challenge for our hope. It is promoting a life in which hope and love are rooted in and nurtured by the triune God and it helps Christians and Churches to live and act together.

In Ephesians 4 we read: *“I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*

Called to One Hope – living and acting together as churches in Europe: consequences for the major policy lines for CEC

Based on their faith the churches are challenged to stand for this hope in their living and working together within CEC in the years to come.

Throughout its life and work CEC will illustrate its commitment to equality and diversity by ensuring that the recognised balances of women, men and young people are achieved within its Commissions and projects.

Following the reflections in the Assembly and our analysis of the current situation and in order to contribute to the mission of the Church, the safeguarding of life and the well-being of all humankind, we can outline the following overarching issues along which policy should be shaped in the coming years:

- trust and commitment
- dialogue and strengthening of relations
- coherence and visibility
- witness and responsibility.



1. Trust and Commitment

The active participation of the churches in the life of CEC, as well as their financial support, is crucial for the future. Space is needed to build up trust and commitment of member churches towards CEC. CEC should continue to provide a common platform for all member churches, and also use the existing member church offices in Brussels to reinforce cooperation and networking within its framework.

A fundamental issue in all areas of work and not least in the decision making bodies of CEC has to be increasing the commitment of the churches within the CEC fellowship and building trust among themselves - so displaying transparency in its business and mission.

Recommendations

Therefore CEC shall in the years to come:

- Find ways and methods of working appropriate to the goal of strengthening commitment and trust within its own organisational life and between its member churches.
- In accordance with the motion carried by the assembly “to establish a working group for revision of the CEC as a whole”, reconfigure its structures and processes in a way that assures that transparency, accountability, and acceleration in its decision-making procedures are achieved.
- Reflect on methods of discussion and decision-making in its governing bodies, including a system of consensus decision-making, with a view to facilitating transparency, ownership and predictability of any decisions reached.
- Bring forward proposals for an improved and accountable system of sharing in the financial support of CEC that is both equitable and sustainable.
- Create and support opportunities for the member churches to develop mutual respect and understanding between themselves and the organisation of CEC.
- Secure new and additional sources of funding to support specific projects consistent with the strategic objectives of the organisation (e.g. gender work).
- Ensure that all projects and work undertaken are properly costed and consideration given to whether they provide measurable value for money.

2. Dialogue and Strengthening of Relations

The intention to strengthen dialogue and relations between the churches follows directly the policy line of building trust and increasing commitment.

Dialogue has a deep-seated connection to trust-building. To a greater extent than in the past, dialogue should offer opportunities for the churches to learn from each other with regard to those themes and issues which are important for their theological reflection and also in their practice. Therefore, it is **recommended** that the work of the Commissions will be inter-related in a more systematic way. The coherence and inter-relation of the work of the Commissions has to be developed further. Theological reflection, socio-ethical questions, work with the European Institutions and advocacy work all belong together. This is not just a matter of organisational efficiency; it is a matter of the good stewardship of our common resources.



The agenda of the Churches in Dialogue Commission must include issues which are also relevant to the work of the Church and Society Commission (CSC) or to the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and vice versa. The work of the Commissions as a whole has to reflect the major policy lines and be in harmony with the strategic objectives for which CEC stands. Therefore, it is **recommended** that there be a review of the mandate of the Commissions (see Appendix 1).

In order to implement this new approach, it is **recommended** that the Commissions work with a wider mix of people to ensure that academic theology, socio-ethical expertise and experiences from church-leaders are brought together.

Dialogue and strengthening of relations should not only include people who have taken responsibility in the Governing Bodies or in the Commissions; opportunities should be created for more exchange (e.g. best practices) and ecumenical learning, through consultations, fora, seminars, and (virtual) encounters (e.g. similar to Ecumenical Assemblies) etc.

It will also be very important for ecumenical relations and the ecumenical movement in future to have more young people involved, including young theologians. Therefore ecumenical formation is crucial and CEC will engage more than in the past in this field of work, in particular by strengthening the co-operation with its associated youth organisations in light of the memorandum of co-operation and the strategic plan approved by Central Committee in 2007.

As a consequence of strengthening its own internal relations, CEC should be better placed to partner and work with other churches, organisations, networks and movements.

3. Coherence and Visibility

Given the different confessions, traditions, structures and agendas of its member churches CEC has to act within a wide range of complexity in its own constituency. CEC is confronted with many issues which are on the European agenda today: the economic and social development of Europe, the financial crisis, human rights, interreligious dialogue, migration issues, to name only a few. This agenda is ever changing, never static.

CEC is more than ever challenged to clarify its specific call and task within the various ecumenical organisations and institutions that exist at a national European, and international level.

Recommendations

Therefore CEC shall in the years to come work on its coherence and visibility, and in particular:

- Make clear to its own constituency and to as wide an audience as possible no more than three strategic objectives which will direct its work.
- Direct all of the work of CEC's constituent parts towards achieving the strategic objectives of the organisation. Work priorities will be set by decisions of the Central Committee in consultation with the Commissions.
- Focus on building relations between its member churches and clarifying relationships with churches outside CEC. This is especially necessary with regard to migrant churches (see Charta Ecumenica).



- To set up strategic guidelines for internal and external communication and ensure a coherent and adequate communications infrastructure.

4. Witness and Responsibility

For many people in Europe CEC stood and stands for the work of CSC and CCME in relation to the European Institutions. It is understood as a strong attempt to bring the common voice and witness of Christian Churches into the decision-making processes of Europe. It is also meant to provide guidelines in times when the complexity of decisions in the political arena and their manifold implications even confuses experts. The ability to live together in diversity is an important precondition for sustainable development in Europe and, at the same time, needs to be reflected within CEC itself.

The challenges of social development, globalisation, justice and peace not only need laws and guidelines, not only technical and practical approaches, but also a spiritual and ethical foundation. The work of CEC in favour of social justice and human dignity is an expression of the Christian faith. This is what the churches, and CEC stand for. CEC, therefore, needs to be heard not only as a prophetic voice, but also as a chorus of churches preaching the gospel and singing the song of faith and spiritual strength.

For the sake of CEC and sustainable development in Europe, it will be important to keep both these sides of witness and responsibility together. This should become visible in the area of gender awareness and ethical investment. Theology, church-based advocacy and diplomacy, the prophetic voice and the songs and prayers of the faithful all belong together. Only when they are seen to be inter-related do they constitute a complete witness which is credible and trustworthy to the world.

This is what makes a stronger cooperation between the Commissions and the inter-relation between all parts of the organisation so important and necessary.

Recommendations

In line with this understanding, CEC shall in the years to come:

- Continue to be an instrument whereby churches in Europe can relate effectively to the European Institutions, and at the same time, prove itself to be a fellowship of churches based on a spiritual foundation and therefore proceeding on a common way.
- Recognize that CEC's common witness is enhanced by harvesting the expertise of its member churches and of partner organisations. Before CEC takes up an issue, due consideration needs to be given to whether there are others who are better placed to do the work. Given the financial restrictions, it is necessary to have a clearer understanding and practice of the principles of division of work, cooperation and networking.
- Offer a space of dialogue on global concerns with partners of other continents.
- Offer a forum where questions on the borders between theology, socio-ethics, policy and society can be explored and shared. The Commissions and the Secretariat of CEC will work according to their approved goals.
- Achieve inclusiveness and in turn the full participation at all levels of its life and work of women and men of all ages. This is particularly important with regard to those belonging to migrant churches, ethnic minorities (e.g. Roma and Sami) and people with disabilities.



- Work with the Charta Œcumenica as a fundamental achievement in the life of CEC; reaffirming the implementation of its commitments, with priority being given especially to the mutual recognition of Baptism.
- Provide opportunities for member churches to share and exchange their experiences, ideas and resources in order to strengthen, inspire and motivate each other in their mission.
- See Christianity as integral to the culture of Europe and, therefore, reflect upon the different approaches and attitudes of the churches towards secularization.

Concluding affirmations

As churches in Europe we are sustained by our “One Hope in Christ” which helps us to live and to work together. On our ecumenical journey in the years to come we will strengthen our mutual commitment and our engagement for and within CEC.

This leads us to the following affirmations:

We believe CEC to be a forum for mutual learning and ecumenical formation, for bridge-building and for strengthening relations between the churches and for common witness.

We believe CEC to be the common voice of the member churches in Europe and an ecumenical instrument for cooperation with and advocacy to the European institutions.

We believe CEC to be a platform for dialogue with other Christian churches and other faith communities in Europe.

We believe CEC to be a community living the diversity with migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities.



Appendix 1

Mandates of the Commissions

Mandate of the CiD

Looking back at 2003, the CiD was given its mandate with the following priorities of work by the 12th Assembly of CEC:

1. Relations between the Orthodox churches and other member churches of CEC
2. Our common mission in Europe
3. Majority and minority churches
4. Cooperation among theological Faculties in Europe
5. Spirituality and worship life at ecumenical meetings
6. Theology of Religion
7. Ecumenical training & formation in Europe
8. Healing of Memories

Mandate of the CSC

The commitment of the churches for European integration is reflected in the mandate of the CSC.

The mandate reads as follows:

- (a) Study and examination of Church and Society questions in a socio-ethical perspective such as EECCS and CEC have undertaken up to now (for example: peace, justice and the integrity of creation, reconciliation, churches and governments);
- (b) Monitoring the European institutions: European Union, Council of Europe, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, in relation to themes such as the European integration process, democratisation, establishment of the rule of law, human rights and minority questions, European security, economic and social questions, the environment;
- (c) Dealing with the specific responsibility of the churches in the member states of the European Union for international policies of the EU.

Mandate of the CCME (of CEC)

As outlined in the joint memorandum of understanding “Different Backgrounds – Joint Future” signed by the leadership of CEC and CCME in Vienna in November 2007, the CCME General Assembly and CEC Central Committee have affirmed the mandate of the CCME of CEC, namely to

1. serve the churches in their commitment to strangers, responding to the message of the Bible, which insists on the dignity of every human being, in order to promote an inclusive policy at European and national level for migrants, refugees and minority groups;
2. work on issues of migration and integration, asylum and refugees, and against racism and discrimination, undertake research, initiate, develop and implement projects in these fields;
3. represent the common voice of the churches in Europe on the above issues vis-à-vis the European institutions.