

# Initial Draft for the Policy Reference Report 13<sup>th</sup> CEC Assembly 15-21 July 2009 Lyon, France

### Called to One Hope in Christ Living and Acting together as Churches in Europe Future Perspectives for the work of CEC

#### The major challenge: Yearning for unity – experiencing diversity

Europe in the year 2009 is facing ongoing and new challenges arising from diversity. The variety 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 becoming nomads at the whim of world economy. 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 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 can be used as a reason for injustice, rivalry and conflict.

Therefore – not only out of political and economic motives – the yearning 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 coming together in Lyon celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). Out of the ruins of World War II and then their separation in hostile political systems the churches understood that they had the unique chance of building bridges between the churches with their different confessions and traditions. At the same time their coming together in the fellowship of CEC could be understood as symbolizing hope for a Europe where people would learn about reconciliation and peace, living together as good neighbours and eventually recognising themselves to be sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ.

With gratitude we therefore recall the positive role churches – and CEC – were able to play in the processes of reconciliation, in democratic movements, as bridge builders and as supporters for the removal of the iron curtain. With pleasure we heard at the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu how important the role of churches is seen to be by politicians in the process of the growing together of Europe.

It is also true that the churches themselves still have to explore how their common experience within CEC can make them walk together on a common way, giving a common witness to the one hope in Jesus Christ. Despite all visible diversity the yearning for "visible unity" seems to be a hope which is still on the agenda. However, it also has 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.

#### "Called to One Hope in Christ" – the ecumenical journey



CEC member churches share the experience of their ecumenical journey throughout 50 years. Despite their different traditions and confessions they have paved ways for dialogue, for mutual understanding and common witness and action. At the same time many expectations and hopes related to the theological vision of "visible unity" are not yet fulfilled. During the years from Trondheim to Lyon hopes and obstacles in equal measure have shaped the ecumenical land-scape both within and outside CEC.

"Called to One Hope in Christ" – this theme which heads and accompanies the 13<sup>th</sup> Assembly of CEC reminds all Christian Churches of their common origin in Jesus Christ. Yet this theme is not only a reminder, but 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.

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, helping Christians and Churches living and acting 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. The story which should be told then is a story about commitment and trust, about dialogue and strengthening of relations, about coherence and visibility, about witness and direction. These are then the major policy lines for the work of CEC following the Assembly.

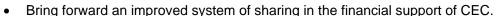
#### 1. Commitment and Trust

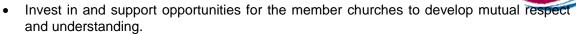
The active participation of the churches in the life of CEC, as well as their financial support, is crucial for the future.

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

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 life and between its member churches.
- Implement flexible structures which assure that transparency, accountability, and acceleration in decision making procedures are achieved. This includes clarification of the size and the role of the Central Committee, the Presidium and the Commissions as well as their relationship one with another, and of the responsibilities of the General Secretary.
- Reflect on methods of discussion and decision making in its governing bodies including a system of consensus decision making
- Prepare for consideration by its 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly a thoroughgoing revision of its legal texts.





#### 2. Dialogue and Strengthening of Relations

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

Dialogue has a deep rooted connection to trust-building. More than in the last years, dialogue shall offer opportunities for the churches to learn from each other related to 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 is to be developed further. Theological reflection, socio-ethical questions, work with the European Institutions and advocacy work all belong together.

Dialogue is a task of all Commissions. This has to become more visible in the future. The agenda of the Churches in Dialogue Commission will for example take up issues which are also relevant in the work of the Church and Society Commission (CSC) or in 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 has to make clear which are the goals and issues which CEC stands for.

In order to implement this, the Commissions will work with a wider mix of people to ensure that academic theology, socio-ethical expertise and experiences from church-leaders can be 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 and ecumenical learning, through consultations, fora, seminars, and virtual encounter etc.

It will also be very important for ecumenical relations and the ecumenical movement in future to have more young people (especially theologians) involved. Therefore ecumenical formation is crucial and CEC will engage more than in the past in this field of work, e.g. by organising summer universities and creating other opportunities to learn about other Christian confessions and traditions.

#### 3. Coherence and Visibility

Given the different confessions, traditions, shapes 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.

CEC is more than ever challenged to clarify what is its specific call and task within the various ecumenical organisations and institutions in Europe.

CEC has limited resources to shape its work in future.

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

Make clear to its own constituency and to as wide an audience as possible two or three issues which will have priority in its work.



- By the end of 2010, through Central Committee, make a decision about the location of the CEC offices.
- Strengthen the cooperation of and between the Commissions as well as the relationship between the Commissions and the CEC decision making bodies.
- Set work priorities through decisions of the Central Committee and/or the Presidium (Executive Committee).
- Focus on relation-building between its member churches and clarify its relationships with churches outside CEC such as the Roman-Catholic, the Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches.

#### 4. Witness and Responsibility

For many people in Europe CEC stood and stands for the work of CSC and CCME related to the European Institutions. It is understood as a strong attempt to bring the witness of Christian Churches into the decision making processes of Europe. It is also meant to provide guidelines in times in which the complexity of decisions in the political area and their manifold implications are confusing even experts. The capacity to live together in diversity is an important precondition for sustainable development in Europe and is at the same time reflected within CEC itself.

The big challenges of social development, justice and peace need not only laws and guidelines, not only technical and practical approaches, but also a spiritual and ethical foundation. This is what the churches, and what CEC stands for. CEC therefore needs to be heard as a prophetic voice, but also as a chorus of churches singing the song of faith and spiritual strength.

It will be important for the sake of CEC and sustainable development in Europe of the public in Europe to keep both these sides of witness and responsibility together. Theology, diplomacy and advocacy, the prophetic voice and the songs and prayers of the faithful all belong together. Only in their interrelation do they incorporate a complete witness which is credible and trustworthy to the world.

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

Given the diversity which exists within CEC itself, it is necessary that this is reflected at every level of CEC's work and decision making.

Following this understanding, CEC shall in the years to come:

- continue to be an instrument for the churches in Europe in relation to the European Institutions and at the same time prove itself as a fellowship of churches based on a spiritual foundation and therefore proceeding on a common way;
- work e.g. on Human Rights, on Migration and Migrant Churches and for other issues related to Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation. More than in the past, CEC will offer a forum where questions on the border between theology, socio-ethics, policy and society can be explored and shared;
- achieve full participation at all levels of its life and work by women and men;



- work with the Charta Œcumenica as a fundamental achievement in the life of CEC; reaffirming the implementation of its commitments, with priority especially given to the mutual recognition of Baptism;
- see Christianity as integral to the culture of Europe and therefore also 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 bridgebuilding and for strengthening relations between the churches.

We believe CEC to be an ecumenical instrument for cooperation with the European institutions.

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

Lyon, 29th May 2009

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