



## **From Trondheim to Lyon** CEC Activity Report to the 13<sup>th</sup> Assembly

### **Introduction**

During the last six years, the Conference of European Churches (CEC) has sought to fulfil the mandate given it by the Trondheim Assembly in the context of a Europe and of a European Ecumenical movement which has been markedly on the move. In his report to the Trondheim Assembly, the then General Secretary of CEC, Dr. Keith Clements, spoke of the challenging ecumenical context within which all who promote ecumenism need to operate in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That comment rings no less true in 2009 than was the case in 2003.

The Ecumenical scene has been very much on the move in the last six years. The relationship between CEC, as the Regional Ecumenical Organisation in Europe (REO), and the World Council of Churches (WCC) has been a consistent topic for discussion, as the WCC itself has been exploring its role in relation to REOs as part of the wider discussion concerning ecumenical reconfiguration. In Europe, the discussion has been concentrated around our respective roles in Central and Eastern Europe; and in recent years has coincided with a discussion within CEC about our own visibility within that part of Europe. In these last years, too, CEC has been operating against an increasingly diverse ecumenical scenery. The new impulse towards ecumenical engagement with the churches of Pentecostal tradition has meant that we have had to ask ourselves questions about how we can relate to those churches of this tradition which are increasingly active, and increasingly growing, within Europe. Also a pronounced “post- or non-denominational Christianity” has been emerging. Meanwhile the relationship of CEC member churches with the Roman Catholic Church has been strained by official pronouncements which have created widespread disappointment. Partly as a result of that, the call has come from our President to look seriously at whether we can find ways of developing one ecumenical tent within Europe to include the Roman Catholic Church along side the Pentecostal Churches and other newer expressions of church life in Europe. Following on our working together with the Council of European Bishops’ Conferences (CCEE) to shape the EEA3, we are also in the process of reflecting together creatively on how we should shape our relationship with CCEE as well as other Roman Catholic organisations in the years to come.

Our ecumenical work has gone forward too in the context of calls from some quarters for a closer “alliance” between the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodoxy. In response to this, CEC has affirmed its own commitment to enabling the CEC Orthodox member churches to play a full part in our common life together with all our member churches. The reports which follow of CEC’s activities over the last six

years demonstrate that commitment. It is in this context that the Churches in Dialogue Commission has been actively organising consultations between churches of Orthodox and non-Orthodox Traditions.

CEC has been operating as well in the context of the increased impact of secularisation. In many parts of Europe, old assumptions about familiarity with the Gospel and its claims can no longer be made. It is in that context that the Mission Research post which is described in the report from the Churches in Dialogue Commission has been carefully developed.

Nor has Europe stood still in its political life. When CEC last met in Assembly in Trondheim, fifteen nations were members of the European Union. In the years since then the number of nations in membership has grown to 27, with further applications being considered. Whilst the number of members of the European Union has grown, the Union itself has found it hard to find agreement on how the Union can function in this new configuration. Attempts through the form of a constitutional treaty to unite the member nations around an agreed statement of what is the nature and extent of the Union which together they wish to build have proved hard to come to reality. CEC through its Church and Society Commission has needed to work hard to make an impact on behalf of our member churches on these evolving discussions, not least through its contribution to the Constitutional Convention. It has worked hard to promote a vision of a Europe which is open, reconciled, just, respectful of human rights. At the same time, and for a variety of reasons, a number of nations within Europe remain outside the EU and CEC has needed to work hard to play our part in ensuring that their interests and concerns are not neglected in the wider European scene.

Also in these last years Europe has not stood untouched by developments elsewhere within the world. One of the features of the last years has been the extent to which CEC and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) have been working increasingly together in order to alert churches and governments within Europe to the human dimension of the phenomenon of migration, both across Europe and from outside. In response to this it has been part of CEC's service to our member churches with the invaluable support of the skill and expertise offered by our strengthening partnership with CCME to speak publicly on issues such as human trafficking and detention of migrants. Together in these last six years we have sought to respond creatively to new situations created by new realities. This growing partnership with CCME has for us at CEC been a marked feature of the last six years and it reaches its culmination in the integration which has now been agreed among us to journey together as one organisation to strengthen the common witness for the strangers among us.

Nor has Europe been untouched by the fact that we live increasingly in a globalised world. Promoting as we do a Europe which is not shut in on itself but which is open to the needs and concerns of those who live beyond its borders, not least within the Global South, CEC has needed to be active in expressing concern at the human cost of globalisation, recognising that some of the responsibility for the negative impact of globalisation lies at Europe's doorstep, whilst expressing the aspiration that Europe might become less part of the problem and more a part of the solution. It was this need to express the response of European churches to issues arising from globalisation

which led to the initiative to inform the debate on globalisation and on the AGAPE process at the 2006 WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre. This happened through a CEC/CSC paper on globalisation from a European perspective, about which more can be read in the section in this Report from the Church and Society Commission. Issues arising from globalisation have increasingly impacted on the work of CEC and have formed part of the background against which we have been operating.

Nor has CEC been able to ignore the fact that the Europe which we serve is increasingly made up of different cultures and traditions. It is against that background that this report sets out the promotion of Intercultural Dialogue which has taken place through the work of the Church and Society Commission and the dialogue with those of Muslim tradition in Europe which we have been undertaking jointly with CCEE.

This introduction sets out the context against which we have been operating. The pages which follow show how CEC has been seeking to work within and in response to that context. We are grateful to all who in any way have helped us gain a clearer understanding of the Europe which we serve. The Europe of 2009 is a Europe which is very different from the Europe in which we were founded. We are determined that today and in the years to come, CEC will have sufficient flexibility to be able to respond to new situations and new realities. The pages which follow demonstrate, we believe, CEC's ability to adapt and to reflect changing circumstances. We commend them to your attention.