

Conference of European Churches
Work Priorities 2009 – 2015
Church and Society Commission (CSC)

The Europe we are hoping for

Towards a Work Programme for the Church and Society Commission (CSC) of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) 2009-2015

Our hope for Europe

The Charta Oecumenica describes the integration of Europe as follows: “We are convinced that the spiritual heritage of Christianity constitutes an empowering source of inspiration and enrichment for Europe. On the basis of our Christian faith, we work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail. ... We commit ourselves to seek agreement with one another on the substance and goals of our social responsibility, and to represent in concert, as far as possible, the concerns and visions of the churches vis-à-vis the secular European institutions.”

CEC and its Church & Society Commission understand Europe always as the whole continent, “from the Atlantic to the Urals, from the North Cape to the Mediterranean” (Charta Oecumenica).

Our mandate

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.

Bridge-building between churches and the European institutions

Communication is an integral part of everything the CSC does. Since 2004 CSC has produced an annual report, which in an attractive and easily readable way provides the churches' views on current European debates and highlights some of CSC's key activities. The CEC membership is kept updated on European developments through CSC Updates on European affairs, often accompanied by CSC briefings and reports, which provide more in-depth information on particular questions.

A crucial form of "communication" is the concrete involvement of member churches and associated members in the work of the CSC through working groups, task forces, statutory meetings, consultations and seminars, but also through meetings with the institutions provided by CSC. The meeting of Church and Society Secretaries of European churches is one example of an extensive sharing among CEC member churches and associated organisations on topical questions, an annual meeting in the CSC calendar in order to ensure that the ongoing activities of CSC meet and reflect the needs and concerns of the membership.

Looking back to 2003

The CSC section of the Trondheim to Lyon report gives account of the work implemented by CSC since the last CEC Assembly in Trondheim in 2003. It reflects three main dimensions of CSC work:

1. Content work
2. Co-operation with and among CEC member churches and associated organisations.
3. Relations with the European institutions. You will also find these three dimensions in the document on CSC working mechanisms and methods, which can be found in the CSC section of the CEC website.



Looking forward to 2015

A first proposal for the new CSC work programme has been discussed in the meeting of Church and Society Secretaries of European Churches in October 2008. Following this meeting, the document has been modified and adopted by the CSC Executive Committee.

We are herewith presenting this proposal to our member churches and associated organisations inviting you to give your comments and contributions. All your answers will be carefully taken into account.

It is envisaged that, based upon responses from our member churches and associated organisations, a work programme proposal will be developed by the last meeting of the Church and Society Commission, which will meet in Denmark, **11-15 March 2009**. After that it will be presented to a CEC Working Group prior to the Assembly, which is mandated to prepare the input for the Policy Reference Committee to be established at the Assembly. The Assembly itself will then have to establish priorities for the work of CEC and its Commissions.

What is CSC best placed to do?

In relation to its member churches and to the partner organisations and in view of an overwhelming agenda, it is important to ask:

- What is CEC and its CSC best placed to do?
- What can be done better by individual member churches and/or partner organisations?

Over the years, the cooperation and division of labour with other organisations and bodies have become ever more important, first and foremost with the two other CEC commissions, but also with associated member and partner organisations of CEC, such as the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), APRODEV, Eurodiaconia, the Association of Academies and Laity Centres in Europe (Oikos Europe), the educational partner organisations and others. Of particular importance in this regard are other offices of CEC member churches in Brussels and Strasbourg and our relationships with Roman Catholic partner organisations, first and foremost with COMECE. Furthermore, CSC seeks to cooperate with the European umbrella organisations of other faiths as well as with other European networks.



In addition, cooperation with sub-regional organisations and groups of churches has become ever more important for CSC and a way to “bring Europe closer to the people”. The cooperation with the Conference of the Churches Along the Rhine, the Theobalt Network as well as with the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the Church of Sweden on European issues could here be mentioned as good examples.

The basis of our hope and our work

It is important to highlight that CSC is a very distinct body and not just another NGO in Brussels and Strasbourg. CSC is a faith-based organisation in the service of its constituency. The work of CSC is foremost theological work, starting from faith-based ethics and developing its relevance for present day challenges. In addition, CSC also has a spiritual presence, for example through participating in the work of the ecumenical Chapel of the Resurrection – the “Chapel for Europe” in Brussels.

Making hope visible: CSC’s working priorities

The following chapters propose a number of working priorities for CSC in the forthcoming years. It has to be noted that many of them are closely interconnected. Moreover there are a number of cross-cutting topics, which shall be taken into account in all working areas like gender mainstreaming (cf. CSC’s policy paper on gender mainstreaming), cooperation among different European regions and sustainable development. Analysing and evaluating European legislation processes is a general feature of the work in all thematic areas covered by CSC.

1. European Integration: a value-based project

The process of European integration is a key theme for CSC’s involvement in European politics. The European church leaders’ meeting in 2006 pointed out what CEC and its CSC have long emphasised: Europe must be more than just an economic project. The churches are an important actor to ensure that Europe as a whole is a value-based project promoting the human, social, spiritual and religious dimension of the European project. Intercultural and interfaith dialogues are important elements contributing to the process of integration. All these dimensions play a role in encouraging and supporting the active participation of the people of Europe in European integration and making them owners of that process.



European integration means for the churches a process which involves the whole continent, not only EU member states. Special attention needs to be given to some specific areas of concern, such as the relationship of the EU and Turkey, perspectives of the Balkan countries in view of possible EU accession, but equally to the questions of EU relations to neighbouring countries.

Objectives:

- to further reflect together with member churches on the value basis of the European integration process and to remain in dialogue with the European institutions on implementing commonly shared values
- in context of ongoing integration to address East – West differences in Europe
- to monitor the relationship of the EU with the candidate countries
- to monitor the relations of EU members states with Eastern Europe countries both within the context of EU (the European Neighbourhood Policy) and the other pan-European organisations (OSCE, CoE)
- to address cultural and religious diversity in Europe;

2. Globalisation: justice and responsibility

The consequences of economic globalisation are becoming increasingly evident. Churches in Europe are more than ever challenged to address the impact of globalisation in different parts of the globe, including in different parts of Europe: the issue of global justice and the responsibility of the industrialised countries in Europe for other regions of the world. CSC has since 2008 been engaged in a project addressing impacts of globalisation with the Latin American Council of Churches and has started a dialogue with the All African Council of Churches. CSC also supports and plays an active role in the work of the World Council of Churches on globalisation including its plan to particularly examine the situation in Europe in 2010.

The CSC work on globalisation has thus far been built on the document 'European churches living their faith in the context of globalisation.' It is underlining the different experiences with globalisation in various parts of the continent. Particular European perspectives are being introduced to the debate, e.g. experience with the model of a social market economy and the European integration process: There are many bilateral contacts between churches from Europe and churches from other continents. What needs to be strengthened is a common voice of churches from Europe in reaching out to the partners outside the continent as well as to the political institutions.



Objectives:

- to follow up the recommendation of the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu calling for initiation of a consultative process, addressing European responsibility for ecological justice and for the just shaping of globalisation;
- to work on raising awareness of churches in Europe on the process of globalisation and its consequences;
- to strengthen a common voice of churches in Europe in addressing globalisation;
- to intensify cooperation with the churches' specialised ministries providing development aid on the European level and in relation to the European institutions.
- to intensify a dialogue between churches in Europe and churches from other continents;
- to contribute actively to the WCC process on Wealth, Poverty and Ecology.

3. Environment and Climate Change: change our lifestyle

In line with the recommendations of the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu (2007), CSC continues to promote the engagement of European churches in environmental matters including climate change: CSC is engaged in and serves as the secretariat for the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) in order to strengthen the common witness of the churches in this field and to offer a platform for sharing best practices and for reflection. It is by now recognised that the protection of environment has a strong ethical dimension. The issue of environmental justice and of environmental education challenges the lifestyle of many Europeans and of the societies at large. An increasing number of CEC member churches are engaged in reducing their own ecological footprint as well as in raising awareness in the parishes and society.

CSC brings the churches' voice to the political debate on climate change, care for the environment and sustainable development. Currently, the focus of the policy debate is on climate change and the reduction of CO₂ emissions in the context of global negotiations on the follow-up process for the Kyoto Protocol. The EU has set itself ambitious targets, the implementation of which is now under negotiation and challenged by the current financial crises.

Objectives:

- to examine environmental questions from a theological and ethical perspective and to strengthen the common witness of the churches on topics such as mobility, eco-management and sustainability;



- to continue to support ECEN as a network of European churches and to support, *inter alia* through ECEN, CEC member churches in strengthening their environmental work
- to promote a Creation Time in European churches (EEA3 recommendation)
- to implement the European eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS) at the Ecumenical Centre in Brussels and to continue help managing CEC meetings in a more ecologically sound way
- to bring the voice of churches in the European policy debate on issues related to climate change, the promotion of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources and to support their engagement in the public discussion at the national level.

4. Social and Economic Policies: challenging the growing gap

Social and economic questions are at the heart of the debate on the future of Europe: Europe is challenged by a growing gap between the rich and the poor. Unemployment and social exclusion remain to be a major threat in many European states. The worldwide economic and financial crisis, which started in summer 2008, has shown that only closely coordinated international policies shall have an impact on the international economic processes. But, while economic policies are today mainly shaped on a trans-national level, the competences on social protection have remained to a large extent on the national or even regional level. This leads to an imbalance of social and economic policies in Europe, which is one reason, why the European integration process is a source of frustration for many people especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

For the churches, caring for those who are in need and advocating for those who have no voice are a constitutive part of their identity. In so doing, churches are bridge-builders for a socially cohesive society.

Objectives:

- to work for just societies that provide opportunities and access to participate for everyone according to his or her capacities.
- to promote employment policies, which pay special attention on precarious work situations and on the excluded from the labour market.
- to strengthen the role of churches and diaconal ministries as providers of social and healthcare services.



- to intensify networking among CEC member churches and associated organisations on social and economic issues and to intensify cooperative links with other stakeholders in this area.
- to promote Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Socially Responsible Investment (SRI), including helping CEC member churches to develop their own strategies.

5. Agriculture and Rural Life: care for rural communities

The expenditure of the European Union on agriculture remains its single largest budget item. However, the reform of the EU budget after 2013 may lead to a considerable review of the Common Agricultural Policy budget in particular. In this process a number of ethical issues will need to be considered, such as food security, ecological and sustainable farming, the effects of budgetary changes on people living from farming or living in rural communities, and a sustainable agricultural policy on the global scale.

In the period from Trondheim to Lyon, CSC has commissioned a policy document on agriculture and rural life, which addresses the above-mentioned ethical issues. In the forthcoming months and years this document and its implications needs to be discussed with member churches and the European institutions. CSC has also worked with the Churches European Rural Network (CERN) on the above-mentioned issues.

Objectives:

- to monitor the developments within the European institutions, regarding the reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy and the global trade negotiations according to the ethical criteria and their implications included in the policy document.
- to provide, in cooperation with the Churches European Rural Network (CERN), a platform for churches to address issues related to agriculture and rural life.

6. Human Rights and Religious Freedom: defending the equal value of all human beings

Human Rights are a pillar of European integration. All political institutions to which CSC is relating are based on a commitment to human rights. However, common values mean very little if they are not practised. While there is a broad consensus on the



importance of human rights on an abstract level, disagreements follows when their content is specified. In the Charta Oecumenica, churches in Europe committed themselves to support human rights and to defend the equal value of all human beings. But also churches are involved in the debate on the implementation of human rights and on the universality and indivisibility of them.

CSC will continue to assist the member churches to work on their human rights concept. For churches, the promotion of religious freedom for the individual as well as for religious communities remains a priority; especially at a time where the role of religion in the public sphere is being questioned. However, CSC and its member churches are equally engaged in promoting human rights more broadly. This includes, for instance, safeguarding rights of certain vulnerable groups and activity in promoting social and economic rights.

Objectives:

- to offer a platform to European churches for the reflection on human rights from a theological perspective and sharing best practices
- to study human rights issues (religious freedom, anti-discrimination, gender equality, children's rights etc.) in relation to the needs of member churches and in view of developments in the European institutions
- to continue to strengthen the engagement of member churches in the protection of human rights, e.g. by developing a human rights manual with training sessions for churches as a theological contribution to the human rights education and by fostering the networking among churches on human rights
- to assist the member churches in South Eastern Europe in implementing human rights, dealing with the consequences from the Communist past and strengthening the rule of law and democracy
- to bring majority and minority churches together on the issue of religious freedom
- to strengthen the common voice of the member churches on human rights vis-à-vis the European institutions and to contribute in particular to the OSCE Advisory Council on Freedom of Religion and Belief, the Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Human Rights and the EU Fundamental Rights Agency.



7. Ethics, Science and Technology, including Bioethics and Biotechnology: New ethical challenges

CSC and its predecessor EECCS have a long-standing record in being engaged in issues relating to bioethics and biotechnology. CSC has observer status in the Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Bioethics and works closely with the Institutions of the European Union. The Working Group on Bioethics and Biotechnology has produced a number of policy documents on issues such as ageing, euthanasia and stem cell research (cf. CEC website). These documents have served as a basis for discussions in the member churches as well as for submissions to the European institutions.

With new technological developments European societies are facing new challenges in the field of science and technology, which go beyond the sphere of bioethics and biotechnology. Member churches have therefore suggested that CSC should broaden its spectrum towards issues like nanotechnology and communication technologies. They stress the need for deepened ethical reflection on the impact of science, technology and the widening gap between those who profit from scientific research and those who do not. The mid-term evaluation of the 7th Research Programme of the EU in 2010 might serve as an important focal point.

Objectives:

- to continue bringing together the churches' opinions and ethical reflections on bioethical and biotechnological issues;
- to examine the impact of information and communication technologies from a theological and ethical perspective;
- to intensify the work on new technologies such as nanotechnology;
- to monitor the European institutions as they develop a political framework in the area of research, science and technology, with an emphasis on bioethics and biotechnology;
- to bring the churches' voice to the debate within the European institutions including the mid-term evaluation of the 7th EU Research Programme.

8. Peace, Security and Reconciliation: Non-violent conflict prevention and crisis management

The quest for peace and reconciliation has been the *raison d'être* of CEC since its inception. At the three European Ecumenical Assemblies, the churches in Europe re-



committed themselves to actively engage themselves in peace and reconciliation processes as well as in promoting a preferential option for non-violent means of conflict prevention and crises management. To this effect, capacities have been developed and strengthened in many churches and church-related organisations. The Future Conference prior to the Lyon Assembly re-emphasised the need for a pan-European instrument and mechanism of churches for mediation among churches, for mediation in conflicts with a religious dimension and in society. This mechanism would ideally have a major contribution to peace in Europe but would require strong commitment of CEC member churches and notable staff resources.

Recent developments, such as violent conflicts among and within states, the participation of European troops in peace keeping and peace enforcing missions as well as the proliferation of small arms and the increasing arms trade challenge the churches to continue to reflect theologically on issues related to peace, security and reconciliation as well as to strengthen their common and active engagement in promoting just peace, reconciliation and non-violent means of conflict management.

The preferential option for non-violence is the yardstick by which the churches measure the engagement of the European political institutions in terms of conflict prevention and crises management. Over the last years the EU has proceeded apace in developing its Common Foreign and Security Policy. Whereas EU crisis management is largely of a civilian nature, more commitment to conflict prevention is needed.

Objectives:

- to reflect from a theological perspective on the concept of non-violence and its implications, including, for instance, issues related to the relation between security and vulnerability, just peace, and the preferential option for non-violence.
- to strengthen the common reflection and action of European churches on issues related to peace, security and reconciliation, such as the arms trade and the proliferation of small arms and nuclear weapons
- to support churches and church-related networks engaged in peace-building and reconciliation
- to monitor and lobby the European and global political institutions with the aim to increase their non-military capacity for conflict prevention and conflict management



9. Education: Promoting shared values

The European institutions have a supportive competence in the field of education. Any of the institutions to which CSC relates is engaged in providing a platform for reflecting on education in Europe. Education is recognised as one of the most important means for promoting shared values, intercultural dialogue and an active European citizenship. It concerns all areas of life and is seen as a life-long learning process, including formal as well as non-formal/informal education.

The Council of Europe has just chosen education as the topic for the dialogue with religious communities in the framework of the inter-cultural dialogue. According to the Council of Europe teaching of religious and convictional facts is a relevant part of primary and secondary school education in order to avoid prejudice against religions and beliefs. EU is providing a number of exchange programmes like Erasmus, Sokrates and Grundtvig. Religion, however, is hardly, if at all mentioned in these programmes.

Churches are important stakeholders in this area as they are engaged in the formal and non-formal sector of education. It is an area in which CSC is closely co-operating with church-related partner organisations engaged in education as well as with the Churches in Dialogue Commission. The most recent CSC plenary re-emphasised the need to bring the common voice of the churches to the political institutions, accompanying the reflection process and the establishment of programmes in the institutions. A particular emphasis in this should be laid on religious education as a means for developing people's identity and for promoting an active European citizenship. Special attention should be given to the churches' role in the teaching of religious and convictional facts in public schools.

Objectives:

- to offer a platform for churches and church-related organisations to reflect in view of the programmes of the European institutions on the role of the churches in promoting education in the field of inter-cultural dialogue and active European citizenship.
- to bring the common voice of churches and church-related organisations through effective instruments to the European institutions as they reflect and develop programmes on education.
- to promote the recognition of churches as important stakeholders in the field of formal and non-formal education in the European institutions.



10. Intercultural and Inter-Religious Dialogue: Promoting tolerance and non-discrimination

Inter-religious dialogue has always been an important dimension of CSC's work. As a follow-up to the "Soul of Europe" initiative, which finished its activities in 2005, CSC has sought cooperation with other faiths in relation to the agenda of the European institutions. This is an area where CSC cooperates closely with the CEC/CCEE Committee for Relations with Muslims in Europe and with COMECE.

In recent years intercultural dialogue has found the increased interest of European institutions. Inter-religious dialogue is treated as one central aspects of intercultural dialogue aiming at promoting tolerance, non-discrimination, social coherence, peace and reconciliation. The Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, adopted in May 2008, as well as the initiatives launched by the European Year on Intercultural Dialogue 2008 have provided important points of entry for the churches in the work with the institutions. This challenges the churches to reflect among themselves on the relationship between inter-religious and intercultural dialogue in the programmes of the institutions and what role they want to play in it.

Objectives:

- to provide a platform for churches to reflect on the concept and best practices of intercultural dialogue and to share experiences;
- to continue to be a critical partner of the European institutions for activities in the field of intercultural dialogue including the implementation of the Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue and the follow-up of the (EU) European Year for Intercultural Dialogue 2008;
- to foster inter-religious dialogue in view of the European institutions' agenda;
- to engage with churches in cities in relation to the joint EU – Council of Europe project on "Intercultural Cities". Strategies to meet the challenges of cultural diversity are about to be developed in collaboration with pilot cities;
- to offer a platform of exchange for churches involved in the EU programmes of the European Cultural Capitals.



One hope and ever new challenges

The work programme to be adopted by the Assembly in Lyon will be the basis for the CSC's work in the forthcoming six years. Past experiences show that such a work programme must remain sufficiently flexible to be able to react to new challenges arising in the churches, in society and in the political institutions. The long drawn out and very demanding process of developing a Constitutional Treaty of the EU, superseded by the Lisbon Treaty, is a typical case in point. This process could not be foreseen when the last work programme for CSC was established.

“Called to one hope in Christ” means to contribute to the European integration process from a Christian perspective. The new work programme for CSC shall allow CEC's member churches and associated organisations to do this together in an ever-changing context.

Brussels and Strasbourg, November 2008