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## The views of the Church of Sweden on CSC Work priorities

In the Church and Society Commission, with its offices in Brussels and Strasbourg, the member churches of the Conference of European Churches have a well-placed and functional platform for their contribution towards the development of the Europe of today and of the future. The work carried out spans a wide range of social issues in close contact with the European organisations involved. This work, characterised by high aims and sound expertise, deserves proper recognition.

At the same time, it is in the local context that the results of joint initiatives must be realised in practice. It is here that the foundations are laid and bridges built for development, reconciliation and solidarity. For this reason, the consultation currently in progress on the focus and goals of the work of the CSC is of great importance if the churches are to be able to contribute towards the development of society in an effective way. Given the scope of the material, however, it is difficult to examine it in depth at this time, and we are therefore limiting our statement to general opinions on the mandate, the priorities and the participation of the member churches.

### The mandate

The Commission's mandate must reflect the member churches' responsibility for and commitment to European integration. This is a fundamental point that must never be overlooked. It is the churches that are the bearers of the contribution made by the Christian faith tradition to society, individually in their own setting and jointly in the collective European perspective. It is the Commission, with its resources, that is the tool by which this is achieved.

The content of the mandate is expressed in three points:

- monitor and analyse church-society issues from a socio-ethical perspective;
- follow and scrutinise the work of the European institutions (the EU, the Council of Europe, the OSCE);
- promote the special responsibility for the EU's international issues incumbent upon the churches in EU Member States.

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The mandate, which encompasses almost all the issues and challenges relevant to life today, sets a wide framework for the work of the commission. It is therefore unavoidable that this work must be limited by clear, target-oriented directives. These directives must be drawn up on the basis of two dimensions in the mandate, firstly the all-embracing and coordinating task, secondly the preconditions and needs of member churches.

It is worth highlighting and welcoming the fact that the commission interprets its mandate as encompassing the entire European continent. This is an important sign that European integration not only concerns politics and the economy but also human, social, cultural and spiritual values. It also means that the task of the commission becomes the business of all the member churches and that the diversity of culture, traditions and interests that they represent places its work on the broadest possible footing.

We note that the emphasis in the mandate is more on observing, analysing and coordinating and less on acting in an independent capacity. This presents some particular challenges for work in the future. There are many organisations that present the voice of the churches on social issues and integration to the European institutions. There is a need for consultation regarding the voice of the churches, particularly regarding Article 17 of the draft Lisbon Treaty. It would be natural for the CSC, with its broad membership, to offer a meeting place in this respect.

Another challenge is growing from the flows that are now shaping society and ecumenism in Europe. The concept of integration is not as clear today as it was 10–15 years ago. This can be seen partly through the global economic crisis currently underway, both within the EU and in its relations with non-Member States. Ecumenism is also finding its way along new paths. Unanimity is tested in the established organisations while other forms of community and bridge-building grow up through informal structures. How is this reflected in the commission's mandate in relation to the commitment of member churches and their responsibility for European integration?

## Priorities

The broad base for work set out in the mandate is reflected in the proposed priorities for the period 2009–2015, which are listed in no particular order of precedence. We realise that we are looking at areas in social development in Europe that involve many challenges. However, we consider that it is not realistic for these ten areas to be given equal priority. As they now stand, there are too many of them and they are too general.

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We view the list provided as a broad summary of issues currently on the agenda for the whole of Europe. In this respect, they correspond to the mandate of the commission and the fields that the work of the commission encompasses. This is confirmed by the CEC Activity Report 'From Trondheim to Lyon', which looks back at the past six years. Everything in that report so closely corresponds to the new proposal for the period 2009–2015 that it gives the impression of a lack of reflection on the content and priorities of the work.

We have read the Joint UK Church Response and agree with their proposal for a work programme that defines strategic objectives for some clear main focuses of the work. What these main focuses are to be must be determined on the basis of the known and expected needs of today and of the future and in relation to over-arching interests and the situation in the individual member churches. One fundamental aspect is also that the work and objectives are derived from what constitutes CEC's identity and fundamental task, and in accordance with the commission's mandate.

According to the CEC's statutes, clearly the assembly is to determine the task of the commissions for the coming period. We recommend that in Lyon:

- firstly, this focuses on a limited number of concrete issues;
- secondly, this is made the subject of discussion in the assembly;
- thirdly, this is passed on to the central committee/commission for work objectives to be drawn up in dialogue with the member churches.

This would create a main focus for the work of the commission that is clear and known to everyone. The participation of the assembly and the subsequent dialogue on the objectives with the member churches places it on a broader footing. When making plans and setting priorities, this also provides a greater opportunity to take a stand on issues that subsequently come up on the agenda.

## The participation of the member churches

We have already drawn attention to the importance of the participation of the member churches as a vital aspect of the work of the commission. In line with this, it is entirely logical for the document to ask which tasks are best carried out through the commission and which through the individual member churches. This could reasonably be determined in consultation between the parties and we see this consultation process as an expression of that. However, the list presented of areas and focuses of work for the period 2009–2015 is both extensive and detailed. It is therefore unclear to what extent it is intended to be the subject of an open dialogue.

There is no question but that a common platform for influencing development in an increasingly borderless Europe is necessary. Nor that there is a task within the over-

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arching perspective of being both active and reactive in relation to events. Initiative must be able to be taken in the name of our shared identity, e.g. in monitoring, addressing and tackling proposals for new legislation. In a reality in which questions are increasingly complex and the tempo ever greater, however, there is a major risk of the over-arching perspective taking over and setting the starting point. Therefore forms need to be developed for a functioning dialogue between the commission and the member churches, where the needs of the latter are also in focus.

The above proposals regarding the influence of the member churches in the assembly and the subsequent dialogue on objectives and a work programme are examples of how the planning and decision-making process can be shared. Even today communication is already well-established between the commission and the member churches. It is valuable and informative but mainly only operates in one direction, towards the member churches. This means that its value depends on how it is received by the recipient. The question is how this information is managed and what feedback is given?

Direct consultation is expressed for example through the annual meetings with ecumenical secretaries and visits from delegations from the member churches. The question is who or what sets the agenda for these meetings? As a collaborative model, however, the dialogue has major benefits. Therefore the participation of the member churches needs to be developed in this form. One option is to invite thematic officers to informal discussions held at a member church or in a region to address a particular issue. We would also like to highlight the importance of regional cooperation for participation. Here cooperation between the Church of Sweden, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the commission's secretariat can serve as an example of the way an ongoing dialogue can be established with an individual region.

## Summary

On the basis of the opinions set out above, we propose that the commission ahead of and during the period 2009–2015:

### regarding the mandate

- works for increased consultation between the organisations that present the voice of the churches on social issues and integration to the European institutions;
- being open to tradition and renewal, manages and conveys the combined contribution of the ecumenical movement towards development and integration in Europe.

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**regarding the priorities**

- provides space for an open discussion on the content of the work at the assembly in Lyon with a focus on a smaller number of main areas;
- passes on the result of this discussion to the central committee/commission for work objectives to be drawn up in dialogue with the member churches.

**regarding the participation of the member churches**

- revises cooperation with the member churches to strengthen and develop work in the longer term, partly by providing more opportunities for consultation;
- in this review particularly pays attention to where initiatives are taken and decisions made and how this is communicated between the parties concerned.

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