

Conference of European Churches
Thematic reference group Economic and Ecological Justice
Brussels, 18 – 19 October 2016

Notes from the meeting

1. Opening and welcome

Peter Pavlovic, secretary of the group

2. Participation at the meeting, apologies for absence

Participation: Adela Denkova, Tamas Kodacsy, Kees Nieuwerth, Panu Pihkala, Hans-Martin Renno, Peter Pavlovic, Raag Rolfsen, Adrian Shaw, Rob van Drimmelen, Sabine Udodesku
Apology for absence: Fr. Ignatios Sotiriadis

Moderator of the group welcomed especially the new member Adela Denkova from the Czecho-Slovak Hussite Church.

3. Agreement on the agenda

Agenda agreed

4. Minutes from the last meeting

- Moderator reminded the group especially Action points agreed at the previous meeting and pointing out that very few of them have been followed. He urged the group to be more active in contributing to different undertaking decided by the group.
- Ad: Ethical investments:
 - o Adrian will share additional relevant documents from the UK
 - o Sabine informed that EKD guidelines on ethical investments have been updated in September, English translation is coming soon. She will share the paper with the group as soon as it is available.
- Secretary of the group shared information about the use of CEC extranet, incl. the access passwords. Extranet is available for sharing the documents between respective TRGs.

5. CEC document: Seeking justice and prosperity for the common future in the European Union. Final draft of the CEC document

Following the introduction by PP members of the group offered reactions to the document, in which has been highlighted:

- Sabine Udodescu – an updated document is a progress since the previous version
- Rob van Drimmelen – paper wrongly indicates that prosperity is the blessing of God
- Adrian Shaw – the document is too long, not addressing basic EU problems: poverty, demography, migration, free movement of labour and 4 basic EU freedoms which created prosperity through supporting big businesses
- Raag Rolfsen – it is a balanced document offering fair space for prophetic and pragmatic perspectives; the document widens the notion of prosperity beyond economic terms

- Panu Pihkala:
 - o summary section offers a good overview of presented arguments; it is a helpful part in an overall outline of the document
 - o P.24 – the paragraph ‘attitude to wealth and prosperity’ needs additional clarification in order to avoid any possible allusion to the ‘prosperity gospel’
- Tamas Kodacsy – very good document, however it is missing reference to Lk 16 in describing the concept of stewardship
- Rob van Drimmelen:
 - o Theological part, especially the text on Trinitarian approach is interesting, however the this part of the document does not read very well; it should highlight more clearly the notion of relationship
 - o Policy recommendation on p.11 should use positive formulation and introduce the notion ‘quality of life’
 - o The document would benefit from an introduction explaining the political process and the intention of the European Commission to present the paper on economic governance in the first half of 2017, as well as indicating previous work of CEC member churches addressing impacts of economic crises
 - o It is important to clarify the relationship between this document and an open letter on future of Europe
- Panu Pihkala:
 - o it is positive that that text outlines the ecological dimension of the problem which goes in a nice way through the document
 - o the book of Larry Rasmussen: Earth community, Earth ethics offers a helpful summary of ecological concern, synthesizing insights from religion, ethics, and environmental science and offering a vision for creating a sustainable earth community, which can be perhaps used as a reference document for the CEC text.
- Kees Nieuwerth – the title of the CH 2 should read: Current stay of affairs
- It have been further advised:
 - o To look again at the title of the document, especially on the using of the term ‘prosperity’
 - o to check how much this work can be shared with COMECE

6. CEC open letter on Future of Europe, incl. impact of Brexit on situation in Europe, situation of churches in the UK and future cooperation of churches in Europe; Process of further discussion of the open letter in CEC and in churches

- Process of further discussion of the open letter in CEC context explained by Pp:
 - o The letter is part of CEC preparations for the next Assembly; an emphasis will be given on dialogue between CEC and member churches; CEC is planning in course of 2017 3 regional consultations in different places of the continent, where the letter and specific concerns of churches related to the outlined themes will further discussed
 - o On the base of responses expected to be received until end of the year; the process leading to the Assembly will be further shaped

Adrian Shaw

- In clarifying the situation in the UK and in UK churches has been explained that there are for the time being two pending cases which take the UK government to court; the underlined point is: Brexit should not be the matter of the government decision only, the parliament needs to be involved as well
- There is wide spread feeling that there no one who could speak on behalf of EU in the Brexit debate; the Union is publicly perceived as an amorphous conglomerate of 3 institutions which are holding together through bureaucracy; this image is not understandable for people and contributes to frustration and disillusion
- Church of Scotland is the only church in the UK clearly in favour of the UK staying in the EU; What can CoS in the current situation do?
 - o To support the Scottish government
 - o Re-commit to our European partners, bilateral and ecumenical
 - o Bringing up values of sharing and caring

Panu Pihkala

- theme of hope is important in the context of both CEC documents, other side of hope is despair, which is very much present in current society in Europe
- Theme coming up in Finland: basic income, incl. not enough meaningful work for everyone; welfare days of Europe are over, we need to look with new eyes on Christian reasoning in the current situation

Raag Rolfsen

- This is very much EU centric document; the discussion needs be extended beyond the situation in the EU; growing feelings of anti-politics, anti-liberal, populist and nationalistic approach, which are increasingly present in many countries in Europe need to be part of this discussion as well
- Themes outlined in the letter will be the subject of to be discussed in Church of Norway

Rob van Drimmelen

- What will be the next step? Are we going to improve the document?

Peter Pavlovic explained that the document will stay as it is, however, the follow up discussion will lead to the Assembly, which can work eventually with the new text on Europe and taking into consideration outcomes of this wide discussion

Tamas Kodacsy

- CEC letter is not taken seriously in Hungarian churches; the document is not read, not considered to be important in Hungarian churches

Panu Pihkala

– for future work with the text and further discussion of the themes outlined in the letter it would be helpful to produce 1 page document summarising the list of issues which should be raised in the context of the letter, as for example: hope vs. despair, growing disillusion in society and missing trust towards politics.

7. Alternative banking and ethical investment – examples of church documents, and church praxis

Adrian Shaw shared his notes from participation at the meeting in London organised by Islamic finance council and Church of Scotland in which have explored possibilities for

working together. As emerging critical issues have been mentioned especially: ethical investments; divestment in fossil fuels and financing for SD (as e.g. the use of pension funds etc.). More information will be shared with the group through e-mail exchange after the meeting.

Sabine Udodescu will share information about situation in Germany

It has to be noted an experience and initiatives of Church of Sweden in this field.

All members of the group are invited to share information about churches' initiatives in this thematic area

8. On the way towards next CEC Assembly

Proposals for the next CEC Assembly and the process leading to the Assembly

Pp shared information about the Assembly venue and timing of the Assembly. He underlined the wish of CEC to make the Assembly the place of sharing about variety of themes CEC and its member churches are concerned about and which they addressed in their daily work.

In the brainstorming discussion the members of the group underlined that the theme of sustainable development should find the proper place in the Assembly programme. The group will be ready to contribute to Assembly preparations in this specific field. Discussion of this theme will continue at the next meeting of the group, when more information will be available following the decisions of the CEC Governing Board and work of the Assembly planning committee outlining the further details of the Assembly planning.

9. Sustainable development goals in the EU

Lutz Ribbe, Andreas Versmann, European Economic and Social Committee

Discussion with guests from the EU institutions

Lutz Ribbe: background in environmental movement in Germany, elected member of the EcoSoc since 18 years, active in preparing opinion on future of energy use in the EU

In the input was highlighted:

Structure and history of the Economic and Social Committee in addressing sustainable development

- The role of the EcoSoc in the European political structure: EcoSoc is an official advisory and consultative body of the European Commission
- EcoSoc is delivering opinions on all legislative proposals coming from European Commission
- EcoSoc activities in implementation and monitoring sustainable development strategy of the EU; This work has not been very active for some time; it has been re-activated after adoption of UN SDGs in 2015
- Major changes in society are not coming up through official and political by decision makers; they are coming up through different, often unrecognised channels within the society, as it happened for example in fall of iron curtain
- Appreciation of outcomes of COP 21 in Paris, without civil society pressure this would not happen

- We will need many changes in society in organising live of society in order to achieve sustainable future
- Most of the people do not understand changes which are necessary to come
- Within society and among politicians it is not very clear what does the change for sustainable future mean
- EcoSoc established Sustainable development observatory as a monitoring body

EU Strategy on sustainable development

- The EU Strategy for sustainable development was adopted in 2001 in Goteborg:
 - o It contains 2 sub-strategies: environmental action programme and Lisbon strategy as an economic pillar; social pillar of the strategy is very weak
 - o The process following the adoption has been marked by missing coordination and lack of interest from the side of decisive people inside the EU structure, notably from the previous President of the EC Barroso
 - o The Lisbon strategy has been re-focused on short term issues, mainly in economic policies; environment has become a sub-chapter of economy
 - o EU Commission in its current composition - no specific commissioner having portfolio on sustainable development; the Commission does not contain in its midst a structure working on a long term perspective

EU energy and climate change policies

- Climate convention signed in 1991; given promises were not kept; new promises were formulated in Paris declaration in COP21
- According to the EcoSoc the EU is not leader on CC and new technologies anymore; in EcoSoc we want to change it
- In working on implementation of outcomes of COP21 there is the need of new thinking on governance structure; politics alone will not be in position to implement the outcomes, it will be business, society etc. who will need to play a role; importance of the dialogue among different stakeholders
- An opportunity: EU directive on targets in renewable energy share; the situation in energy production was simple in the past, characterised by the energy production by big producers; emerging new imperative: a change to decentralised energy production
- There is big chance now to combine: energy policies, climate change policies and regional policies into one package
- 80% of population in EU can produce energy cheaper than it is produced by big entrepreneurs, if people are allowed to do so
- An important task is to develop strategies and identify allies in order to counteract argumentation of big entrepreneurs in in different areas, as a.g. in agriculture (arguments that big producers will be able to feed the poor in developing countries), as well as in energy sector (arguments that big producers will be in position to guarantee sufficient production of renewable energy) according to the motto: give us chance to act and we will do it

- In this regard it is needed to improve cooperation with those doing work on the ground; there is an interest to develop a cooperation with churches

Sustainability now – the EU strategic note on sustainable development strategy

- The document issued in July 2016 outlined the strategic vision of the European Commission
- The document highlights: EU in its current shape is not in position to implement an effective strategy for sustainable development
- We are fascinated by bold statements, they, however, mostly do not reflect reality; EU is one of the most unsustainable economies in the world
- EcoSoc – try to stimulate discussions and activities on grassroots

Andreas Versmann, working as a civil servant in the European Economic and Social Committee.

In his input was underlined:

EU addressing sustainable development

- EU is working on the agenda addressing the issue of sustainable development in horizon 2030:
 - o In world of increasing conflicts, there are different views how the sustainable development should look like;
 - o It is not anymore about north-south divide: all countries are in sense of SD developing, it about GDP growth, it is about paradigm shift
 - o It is agenda for external and internal policies both – task to develop vision of sustainable EU in 2030
 - On 22 November the European Commission will adopt the package outlining the new policy approach; the Commission document will take into consideration results of mapping of European policies and stock taking of Eurostat data with regard to SD implementation
 - The aim of the document will be to seek the EU consensus on SD policies
 - o J.Katainen and F.Timmermans – most important Commissioners along with the President Juncker for future of EU SD strategy; Commissioner Timmermans is the leader of the European Commission project team on SD

The role of Economic and Social Committee

- EcoSoc opinion on EU implementation of sustainable development policies
 - o One year after SDGs adoption not so much happened in the EU
 - o Started mapping of EU policies – listing EU relevant policies
 - o Initiated review consensus on development
 - o Work programme 2016 – new approach for sustainable development, balancing economy, ecology and social issues with vision of 2030
- 177 civil society organisations issued a call for sustainable development before Bratislava Council meeting

Future steps

- Addressing SDGs – it is agenda of values
- There is the need of a new governance system underlining citizens participation
- We will need platform at the EU level overseeing implementation of SD strategy enabling dialogue with civil society: the idea of ‘sustainable development forum;’ the EcoSoc would like to host the forum, churches should be part of it; the forum should be a space enabling a dialogue with European Commission, as well as dialogue among different civil society stakeholders; it is proposed that CEC writes a letter to Commissioners Timmermans and Katainen, who are in co-lead of the initiative, in which it would expressed the wish to participate
- After presentation of the Commission document on 22 November there will be in place a frame enabling concrete future steps in addressing sustainable development agenda in the EU context
- SDGs are value based, underpinning values are of European origin
- SDGs are not well known, however underlining values such as solidarity, responsibility, respect etc. are appreciated; there is a challenge to translate these values into the concept of politics

10. A.O.R.B

Information sharing:

- Syria – initiative bells for Aleppo, ringing church bells every day at 5 p.m
- Sophia earth forum – the conference in orthodox church centre in Helsinki which created the space for sharing between theologians and climate scientists from Finland and Russia; next year will the meeting take place in Russia
- Edinburg – climate conference bringing together academics and church activists will take place in May 2017; ECEN will be involved as one of co-organising partners of the conference; Panu Pihkala will be participating and contributing to the conference; there is an invitation for other members of the group to participate as well
- EKD is developing plans for a new pilgrimage in Germany in 2018 which will be focusing at the use of fossil fuels and divestment from fossil fuels
- CEC open letter on Future of Europe will be one of the documents which will be discussed at the upcoming EKD Synod in November 2016
- LWF is preparing for the next Assembly which will take place in 2017 underling the theme: not for sale – salvation, human being, creation. It may be helpful for future work of the CEC group to look at the materials available under the theme of creation.

11. Homework

The group agreed that all members of the group are invited to contribute to following actions:

In Area: Economic and ecological justice

- Share information about guidelines on ethical investment, especially churches’ initiatives (see point 7 of this notes)

- Share proposals for potential dialogue partners in view of an interreligious exchange on just economy, ethical/responsible investment with an aim to identify a possible partner(s) to invite for the next meeting of the group
- Raag Rolfsen will check a possibility to extend the discussion on economic and ecological justice, ethical investment and sustainable development with a partner from Asia. An exchange of this kind could take place in the context of the autumn 2017 meeting of the group
- The group will be engaged in a reflexion taking into regard 3 starting points:
 - o current challenges in view of economic and ecological justice, as e.g. inequalities in Europe and in the world, how do we share earth resources within countries, between countries and with the rest of the world, as well as how do we take into respect needs of future generations
 - o existing activities in churches in these areas &
 - o what we would like to see in CEC as principles for future development, locally nationally, in Europe and in the rest of the world

Adrian will start with offering an initial paper;

All members of the group are invited to react through their contributions before 15 January

In area: Sustainable development

- Secretary of the group will share with all members the upcoming document of the European Commission on sustainable development, and article by Lutz Ribbe on Laudato Si and the EC strategic note on sustainable development and additional documents related to the SD as they were mentioned in the discussion. WG members are invited to react to share their first reactions in analysing the Commission document (which will be shared with the group after 22 November) and the document Sustainability now from July 2016 by 15 January. The item will be discussed in the next meeting of the group with an aim to develop a CEC perspective on sustainable development in current situation of existing challenges and political initiatives

CEC letter on Future of Europe

- Responses to the CEC Europe letter will be shared to all members of the group

12. Next dates

The next meeting of the group will take place on 27-28 March 2017

Tentative dates for the following meeting:

26-27 September 2017

24-25 October 2017

Pp

November 2016