

## **Conference of European Churches**

### **Thematic Reference Group on Education**

**Meeting on Monday 27 –Tuesday 28 February 2017 in Strasbourg**

#### **Draft Minutes**

#### **1. Welcome and opening prayers**

Hanna Broadbridge (Moderator) welcomed the participants (see Appendix 1) and opened the meeting in prayer. She presented the agenda for the meeting (see Appendix 2).

#### **2. Adoption of the Minutes of the last meeting**

The Minutes of the last meeting were adopted subject to a correction to the list of participants.

#### **3. Exchange of information and ideas**

##### **3.1 Feedback from the Governing Board**

John Murray informed the Group about the main points dealt with at the meeting of the Governing Board in November 2016. The Board had not made any observations on the work in the field of education.

##### **3.2 What is going on in our constituencies? (parts of Europe, churches, country, international institutions we are related to...)**

Tuula Vinko and Hanna Broadbridge presented some information about various recent developments in their countries. Other participants made similar contributions under other agenda items.

##### **3.3 Update on cooperation between different CEC and CEC-related bodies (CCME, organisations in partnership etc)**

The Moderator recalled that the Group had already expressed the view that it would be very helpful if members could receive succinct information from time to time on the activities of the other thematic reference groups. She hoped that the staff and the Governing Board would give further consideration to this matter.

The Group then returned to the question of educational issues raised by current migration movements into Europe. It recalled its earlier extensive discussions, and in particular with Doris Peschke (General Secretary of the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe, CCME) at the last meeting.

Members of the Group referred to the following aspects, among others:

- Increase in hate crimes;
- Not everyone within the churches was favourable to receiving migrants and refugees; we need to take seriously the reservations of some;
- Nonetheless, very many local churches were actively involved in helping migrants and refugees;
- Muslim migrants are sometimes reluctant to receive help from Christian churches;
- It was not always easy to know how to respond to conversions to Christianity, especially from Muslims.
- How is religious education (in its very different national forms and contexts) responding to an increasingly multi-faith reality in most European countries?

Peter Schreiner informed the Group about the Consultation on migration and education organised by CPCE (Community of Protestant Churches in Europe) in Munich in December 2016. Activities were planned in the following areas: family issues, schools, and learning activities to promote living together. He wondered whether the Group could contribute to this work, which was planned to result in Guidelines to be adopted at the CPCE General Assembly in 2018.

Christos Filiotis said that although the Church of Greece was very active in helping with the initial reception of refugees, the question of longer-term integration had not yet been addressed. The presence in Greece of large numbers of Muslims who were not part of the historic minority population raised very difficult and delicate issues for Greek society.

He went on to say that discussions were beginning about moving religious education in a more multi-faith direction (thus complementing the traditional exclusive concern with Orthodox Christianity). While some in the Orthodox Church were in favour of such a development, others were determined to maintain Greek identity through an emphasis on Orthodoxy. Given the controversial nature of these discussions, both for the Church and for the State, he wondered whether CEC might make a contribution to these reflections.

In the light of this renewed discussion on migration and education, the Group renewed its previous decision to prepare short items on good practice suitable for posting on the CEC website. **Each member present agreed to send two or three texts of between half a page and one page in length to the Secretariat, with a copy to the Moderator, by 31 March 2017.** It was further agreed that the Secretariat would write to the absent members of the Group inviting them to contribute too. The Moderator offered to improve the English style of members' contributions where necessary.

### **3.4 Klingenthal Colloquy, October 2016**

The Moderator and Peter Schreiner gave some information about the Colloquy held in Klingenthal. The information day about the current work of the Council of Europe on education for democratic citizenship had been particularly interesting. Peter Schreiner offered to circulate the report of the Colloquy to the members of the Group.

### **3.5 CEC Webinar on EDC October 2016**

The Moderator informed the Group about the webinar on education for democratic citizenship. She considered that this was a good and very cost-effective means of communication.

### **3.6 Update on the work with the Council of Europe:**

- **Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE) meeting**

The Moderator recalled that she had circulated a report on this meeting to members of the Group.

- **Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (11-12 April in Brussels)**

The Moderator recalled that she had circulated a report on this event to members of the Group.

- **Annual exchange with religious communities on the religious dimension of intercultural education (9-10 November 2016)**

Peter Schreiner informed the Group about the 2016 meeting, for which the theme had been education and the prevention of radicalisation.

### **3.7 Update on the work with the European Union**

There had been no new policy developments in recent months.

## **4. Concrete project proposals for CEC General Assembly in Novi Sad**

### **4.1 Discussion: What future for Europe? An Open Letter to CEC member churches**

### **4.2 Discussion: Where is the democratic element in religious education?**

These items were taken together.

The Moderator informed the Group that the General Secretary was hoping that they would produce some useful and stimulating material for the General Assembly to be held in Novi Sad (Serbia) from 31 May to 6 June 2018.

The Group was further informed (on a confidential basis until a public announcement was made in the near future) that the theme for the General Assembly would be the following:

*You shall be my witnesses: Witness, Justice, Hospitality.*

The Group was convinced that educational issues were very relevant to the Assembly theme, as well as to the broader current concern about the future of European integration.

The Open Letter was a thoughtful and useful contribution to reflection on the future of the EU and European integration at a time when many were no longer convinced of its value and effectiveness.

During the discussion, the following issues were mentioned as relevant to a contribution by the Group to the CEC General Assembly:

- The “Common Home” referred to towards the end of the Open Letter;
- Educating students to see the link between local concerns and developments on a global scale (bearing in mind that the Church is both locally rooted and global (“catholic”));
- Education for refugees;
- Inter-religious learning;
- Action against hate speech (cf the Council of Europe’s youth campaign);
- Although education of young people was the main focus, older people also needed to be made more aware of the realities of the European and global context;
- The nature of the relationship between European identity and Christian culture;
- Extremist political parties as a sign of lack of education.

The Group agreed that, as a first step, it should address a letter to the Governing Board and/or the Assembly Planning Committee listing the educational implications of some of the key issues likely to be under discussion at the Assembly and proposing to prepare some input to the Assembly along these lines (working papers and video presentations were mentioned). The bodies addressed would be requested to indicate their response to this proposal.

The Moderator offered to circulate a draft letter to the members of the Group in the near future, asking for their comments and suggestions.

The Group also held a discussion about whether religious education helps children to understand religions other than their own. The question of how Muslim children can learn to express their religious identity in the context of Western society was also discussed.

## **5. Communication**

The Group noted that when it had results to communicate to the outside world these should be brought to the attention of Erin Green, CEC's communications coordinator, who could be relied upon to make use of instruments such as Twitter, Facebook, the Newsletter and the website as appropriate.

The Moderator and the Secretariat would send some information to Erin Green about the results of the current meeting.

## **6. Date of our next meeting**

The Group decided to hold its next meeting on 26 and 27 September 2017 in Strasbourg. 18-19 September was noted as an alternative, but less satisfactory, possibility.

## **7. Any other business**

Christos Filiotis said that the planned colloquy with the University of Thessaloniki and the Council of Europe on religion, *laïcité* and, democracy, about which he had spoken at the last meeting, would now be on the subject of homosexuality. There was still interest, however, in considering the possibility of a second conference on a theme such as religion, *laïcité* and democracy. The Council of Europe would be willing to consider any such proposal that the Group might wish to put forward. The issues were of considerable relevance to current debates in the Greek Church and society. He would continue to reflect on the matter with a view to sending an initial proposal to the Moderator.

## **8. Closing prayer before departure**

## Appendix 1

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Ms Hanna Broadridge (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark – *Moderator*)

Mr Vincent Dubois (United Protestant Church in Belgium) *unable to attend*

Protopresbyter Christos Filiotis (Ecumenical Patriarchate)

Rev Vasile Iorgulesco (Romanian Orthodox Church) *unable to attend*

Mr Michalis Marioras (Church of Greece) *unable to attend*

Ms Hana Moualla (Czechoslovak Hussite Church) *attended by skype*

Mr Jan Schinkelshoek (Protestant Church in the Netherlands) *unable to attend*

Dr Peter Schreiner (Evangelical Church of Finland & Intereuropean Commission on Church and School)

Rev Tuula Vinko (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland)

Ms Maria Wingard (Christian Council in Sweden, Uniting Church in Sweden, Church of Sweden) *unable to attend*

#### From CEC Secretariat:

Mrs Diane Murray

Rev John Murray

Ms Maria Pomazkova

## **Appendix 2**

### **AGENDA**

#### **Conference of European Churches**

#### **Thematic Reference Group on Education**

#### **Meeting on Monday 27 – Tuesday 28 February 2017 in Strasbourg**

**Working times: Monday 14h – 18h30; Tuesday 09h – 12h**

1. Welcome and opening prayers
2. Adoption of the Minutes of the last meeting
3. Exchange of information and ideas:
  - 3.1. Feedback from the Governing Board
  - 3.2. What is going on in our constituencies (part of Europe, churches, country, international institutions we are related to...)
  - 3.3. Update on cooperation between different CEC and CEC-related bodies (CCME, organisations in partnership, etc)
  - 3.4. Kliengenthal Colloquy October 2016
  - 3.5. CEC Webinar on EDC October 2016
  - 3.6. Update on the work with the Council of Europe:
    - The religious dimension of intercultural dialogue meeting (9-10 Nov.2016)
    - Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE) meeting
    - Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (11 – 12 April in Brussels);
  - 3.7. Update on the work with the European Union
4. Concrete project proposals for CEC General Assembly in Novi Sad (creative approach welcomed):
  - 4.1. Discussion: What Future for Europe? An open letter to CEC member Churches (in preparation for the Iceland Consultation March 2017)
  - 4.2. Discussion: Where is the democratic element in the religious education?
5. Communication issues
6. Dates of our next meetings
7. AOB
8. Closing Prayer before departure