

## **Response by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland to the CEC Open Letter *What Future for Europe? Reaffirming the European project as building a community of values.***

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) – being an active and committed CEC Member Church and actively engaged in European Affairs – wishes to thank CEC for this analytical and well-formulated document, inviting Member Churches to participate in the topical and highly significant discussion concerning the future of Europe.

A thorough discussion and in-depth reflection on the kind of Europe we want, and how CEC and its Member Churches can contribute to developing the European project is perhaps needed more than ever today, as Europe – and the European Union – is facing multiple challenges, ranging from disillusionment and the risk of disintegration to geopolitical issues, climate change and the migration crisis.

The open letter is an excellent document, providing an analytical background to the theme. However, we think the document is too long, a little too negative and too backward looking, as there is a need to look forward – with fresh ideas and new visions – focusing on solutions and possibilities, instead of problems and challenges. Throughout the document there is also a certain perception of a clash between an anonymous ‘EU elite’ and ‘the grass-roots level’, which we find unnecessary and misleading.

Whilst we acknowledge that Europe is indeed larger than the EU, our points mainly concern the European Union. A more united and democratic EU, acting in accordance with its common values, can also have a significant and positive impact both on its neighbouring countries and globally. The Council of Europe is also an important institution, and would have deserved more attention in the document.

Our considerations below are based on both the Open Letter and the discussions held at the regional consultations in Reykjavik (March 2017) and Prague (December 2017) and the Nordic-Baltic CEC General Assembly preparatory meeting in Sigtuna (March 2018), in which representatives of the ELCF have participated.

Our key message – which we hope may also be reflected in the declaration on the Future of Europe to be given at the upcoming CEC General Assembly in Novi Sad – is as follows:

### **1. What kind of Europe do we want? – a need for hope and new visions for the future**

Concerning the multiple challenges facing Europe and the European Union today, there is a need to rethink, revive, and reaffirm the European project. Fresh ideas and courageous visions are needed, as is a debate at all levels concerning the kind of Europe we want for the future.

CEC and its Member Churches need to take part in this debate, proclaiming the message of joyful hope, arising from our Christian faith. We need to build bridges, promote peace and reconciliation, and foster a sense of community, belonging and inclusion throughout Europe.

## **2. We need to reaffirm the EU as a community of shared values**

The European Union is based on the common, fundamental values – respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law – enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty. The main goal of the EU is to defend these shared values and promote peace and the wellbeing of the citizens of Europe, and to work for sustainable development and cohesion, combat social exclusion and discrimination and promote social justice and solidarity among Member States.

As the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker said in his State of the Union-speech in September 2017: *“Our values are our compass. For me, Europe is much more than just a single market. More than money, more than a currency, more than the euro. It was always about values.”*

These shared values must be the lodestar for the EU and at the heart of all European policy making. CEC and its Member Churches need constantly to remind political decision-makers at both national and European levels of these common European values to ensure that they are implemented in all policy areas – from migration policies to the promotion of human rights, social justice and sustainable development. There is also a need constantly to debate the notion, impact and relevance of these common values in today’s increasingly multicultural Europe.

## **3. Churches have an important role to play in shaping the vision of our future European home**

CEC and its Member Churches have an important role in adding value to and being constructive and positive – if sometimes critical – partners in developing the European project. The churches have vast expertise and extensive experience in several policy areas – from promoting human rights including freedom of religion or belief, enhancing humane migration policies, and working for climate justice to combating poverty and social exclusion. The churches are working at all levels – from the local, regional and national to the European and global, connecting European citizens across the continent.

The open, transparent and regular dialogue between the EU institutions and churches enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty (Article 17, TFEU) is of paramount importance in this respect, and needs to be further strengthened and developed. To be credible and competent dialogue partners, CEC and its Member Churches require a good knowledge of both contents and structures, including decision-making processes at both the European and national levels. Networking and

collaborating with ecumenical and other relevant cooperation partners are also essential, as is the setting of clear priorities and strategic objectives.

The discussion about the future of Europe certainly needs to continue in the coming years, especially at the local, regional and national levels, and CEC and its Member Churches should continue taking an active part in these discussions. We hope that CEC may provide a platform for its members to discuss, debate and exchange best practices in this respect. Our church has, for example, called on all its dioceses to arrange discussions in 2018 on the future of Europe. The aim is to bring together bishops, church representatives, young people and representatives of civil society to discuss the kind of Europe we want and the role churches should play in this respect with Finnish MEPs and national and local political decision-makers.

As churches, we are called to proclaim the message of faith, hope and love. We need to have confidence and trust in the European project and contribute to developing this with political decision-makers and other cooperation partners. Our task is to build bridges, promote peace and solidarity, and enhance mutual trust, tolerance and respect. We need to work together for a better Europe and a more just, sustainable, democratic and inclusive European Union, thus also promoting the common good at the European level.

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