

Conference of European Churches  
Governing Board

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<u>Topic:</u>	Human Rights & Populism
<u>Agenda Item:</u>	<b>15</b>
Staff in Charge:	Elizabeta Kitanovic
<u>Recommendation:</u>	<i>For information</i>
<u>Annex:</u>	Not applicable
<u>Earlier docs:</u>	Not applicable

# Conference of European Churches

## Project Description

### 1. Title of Project (Working Title)

Human Rights and Populism

### 2. Kind of Project

Conference

### 3. Responsible Staff CEC Human Rights Executive Secretary Dr Elizabeta Kitanovic

### 4. Introduction

Populism is present on the global political scene for over 30 years. This political way of thinking has accelerated in the past few years, both throughout the world and in Europe. In political science there is distinction<sup>1</sup> between “pure people” and “corrupt elite.” Some of the populist leaders claims to represent unified “will of the people” and they are against current political systems. The root of populism finds its way in tribalism, nationalism, anti-establishment, anti-immigration, anti-Islam, anti-globalism, identity politics (left and right), and so on. One example of populist nationalism is promoted by US President Donald Trump: “There is no global anthem, no global currency, no certificate of global citizenship, we pledge allegiance to one flag and that flag is the American Flag!” Donald Trump, Cincinnati, 2016. The targets of populism are: multiculturalism, political correctness, globalism, elitism, migrants and more. Populist strategy goes along the line of simple rhetoric, fake news, conspiracy theories, fears and attacks on media. In Europe there are several populist political parties that have ruling power at the moment:

- UK (UKIP, Brexit)
- The Netherlands (G. Wilders FP)
- Poland (Law & Justice)
- Germany (AfD)
- Hungary (Fidesz)
- France (FN)
- Spain (Podemos)
- Italy (5Star)
- Greece (Golden Dawn) then also in Turkey, Russia and across the Atlantic in Venezuela, Bolivia, USA, and more.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-43301423> 12.11.2018

On the issue of democracy and populism it is useful to see the following slide from Prof Jonatas Machados, Coimbra University presented during the CEC Summer School on Human Rights in Malaga in 2017.

<b>Democracy</b>	<b>Populism</b>
<b>People = majority + minorities</b>	<b>People = majority</b>
<b>Fundamental Rights</b>	<b>Rights of the majority</b>
<b>Separation of powers</b>	<b>Concentration of powers</b>
<b>Rule of law ("government of laws not of men")</b>	<b>Populist leaders above the law</b>
<b>Freedom of expression and religion</b>	<b>Organic and collective thinking</b>
<b>Democracy as ceaseless critical discussion</b>	<b>"Führerprinzip"</b>
<b>Civic virtue of the typical politician</b>	<b>Bad manners and disruptive behavior</b>

Populist leaders attack European constitutions and liberal democracy in order to create new oligarchy. They usually blame foreign entities like Soros in Russia and Hungary for unemployment, they want to weaken civil society and fuel hyperpolarization. From the constitutional point of view, they want to weaken parliaments and limit their power, limit opposition rights, weaken the courts, control the constitutional courts and install their friends as judges, and so on.

When we come to freedom of religion or belief and populism we can see that through the new proposed laws in Europe they suggest limiting religious freedom by controlling foreign funding of the churches and religious communities, controlling the recognition of the theological diplomas for religious staff, limiting the work of missionaries, surveillance of religious buildings and their staff in the name of security, limiting role of religion in the public sphere and religious attires, make stronger laws on defamation, spreading the fears against Muslims and Jews and other religious groups.

In terms of freedom of expression, populist parties try to control media via friendly tycoons, limit voice of labour unions, and attack and killing of journalists who investigate corruption.

During the Summer School on Human Rights (Malaga 2017) the question how populism affect parish level and what pastors should do about it came out very deeply in the discussion. As this is a very complex question, participants in the SSHR and at the CEC General Assembly as well requested that CEC reflect deeper on these issues. In order to combat these phenomena, the Thematic Reference Group on Human Rights suggests that churches create plan of action to combat populism at the church, national, and parish level and avoid the misuse of biblical rhetoric by some populist leaders.

## **5. Aim(s) of the Project**

The Conference will

- a) Explore challenges on the parish and national level linked with the populist politics in Europe in the area of human rights/religious freedom/freedom of expression/freedom of assembly, and other related issues.
- b) Produce action plan for churches how to combat populism in the area of human rights on the parish and national church level.

## **6. Objectives**

The CEC Thematic Reference Group on Human Rights will develop a detailed program together with EU Legislation, and CCME, and other relevant partners.

## **7. Gender-Related Issues**

There should be an equivalent number of male and female speakers.

## **8. Project Overview and timing**

1st half 2019: Two days preparatory meeting with the group of church and academic experts

2nd half 2019: 2 days' conference

## **9. Potential Participants (Target Group)**

The potential participants are church leadership/staff, experts from CEC human rights network and CCME experts.

**10. Timing and Venue(s)**

November 2019, Madrid, Spain

**11. (Potential) Partner Organisations**

Spanish Evangelical Church and FEREDE, Conference of Latin speaking churches (CEPPLE)

**12. Press and Communication Aspects**

The conference will be accompanied by press releases and video.

**13. Follow-Up**

Still to be discussed

**14. Budget**

25 000€

**15. Workload**

30 days for Executive Staff and 10 days for admin staff