

Conference of European Churches Governing Board

Brussels, 22-24 November 2018

Presidents' Report *oral report, check against delivery*

I. The work within CEC

Constitution and legal matter

Following the General Assembly held in Novi Sad, one of the first tasks was to finalize the French version of the constitution adopted in English, so that it could be approved at the Extraordinary General Assembly held on 5 October 2018. The French reference version was developed in close collaboration between our legal team (Patrick Schnabel and Andreas Aarflot) and the law firm KOAN. The extraordinary General Assembly of 5 October was held in the presence of the Presidency, the Secretary General, his assistant and our two legal advisors.

CEC is now a non-profit legal body in Belgium. Its Constitution is now published in the Belgian legal announcement newspaper "monitor". However, two articles do require a royal decree. It is therefore likely to be a few more weeks before the new constitution fully comes into force. Moreover, the law firm KOAN has informed us that a revision of the Belgian law on non-profit associations and foundations is planned for early 2019, and scheduled to come into force on 1 January 2020. It is therefore very likely that the CEC will have to revise its Statutes for a third time at the next General Assembly.

I would like to emphasize the considerable work done by Patrick Schnabel and Andreas Aarflot, and to thank them and their churches for their extremely competent support to the CEC.

Since 5 October, they have been working on a revision of the Standing orders to adapt them to the new constitution. We have agreed on a pre-consultation with the members of the Governing Board and staff in order to clarify issues before the Governing Board as much as possible, and thus avoid lengthy discussion. Some members of the Board of Directors have expressed the wish to have time to discuss it, we have planned two and a half hours for that.

General Secretary and Staff

I was in regular contact by telephone with the General Secretary, usually several times a week. Skype doesn't work yet; we see each other once or twice a month.

I met the staff twice.

A first meeting in June allowed me to get to know the team, but also to evaluate the general assembly and discuss the development of a strategic plan. I also asked them to work on a CEC document that could be made available to Member Churches inviting them to question candidates in the May 2019 European elections.

The second meeting was held in the beginning of November to discuss their strategic proposals.

Meeting of Presidency

The Presidents met on 5-6 October 2018. This meeting was an opportunity to prepare the Governing Board agenda, assess the preparation of the strategic plan and discuss the composition of the Governing Board committees (the proposal is to be discussed this evening). Proposals for the Personnel Committee, Budget Committee, Joint CEC-CCEE committee, will be entrusted to the Nominations Committee once it has been elected.

Consultations

I met Bishop Christopher Hill who gave me a general overview of CEC. He shared with me his personal perception of CEC, the relation with its partners, the current matter areas of work. He also raised several points of attention. I am grateful for such a trustful exchange. At the same time, I was able to meet Bishop Nick Baines, member of Governing Board, and especially Chairman of the Strategy and Policy committee during the General Assembly in Novi Sad. We discussed the methodology for developing a strategic plan for CEC. As drafting a strategic plan until the next General Assembly is one of the Governing Board's first main tasks, I have spent a lot of time defining a method and producing a project that can be the guiding principle of the work of the Governing Board.

The aim is to propose an overall vision of CEC's work in response to the current challenges. We will come-back to this approach in more detail tomorrow, when we introduce the work on the strategic plan.

II. Institutional meetings

In this part I would like to report on introductory visits and presentations and first meetings with partners.

On EU level, we tried to arrange an introductory visit with Franz Timmermans, First Vice-President of the commission in charge of the dialogue with religion (Art 17). Unfortunately, he could not make it. I took the opportunity to introduce myself during the High-level religious meeting organized on the 8th October. According to the invitation, 3 topics were on agenda: 1) Priority challenges the EU should address on migration, 2) social integration and 3) sustainability of our way of life. The meeting was led by the First Vice-president of the European Commission. He sometimes spoke more than he listened. The initial agenda was not followed; we had a more general exchange. In the end, it was more an open exchange than a concrete discussion or a consultation. The photo showing the

consultation was important.

The Themes were as follows: The future of European Union after the May 2019 EU parliament election, Euroscepticism, the need for a European narrative, the climate of irrational fears and its political misuse, the challenge of intercultural societies, the need for trust in a common future, the possible contribution of churches, the gender issue/equality of men and women issue, Brexit, etc.

The meeting with Mrs. Mairead McGuinness, Vice-President of the Parliament, is postponed. It will take place at the end of the year.

CPCE: I have met several times with the General Secretary (previous and current one) and the President. These meetings were opportunities to discuss the continuation of the position seconded by CPCE, and coming from a Landeskirche EKD (as Frank Dieter Fischbach's mandate expires at the end of December). These discussions were successful: The Council of the CPCE, just before its General Assembly, decided in principle to renew the appointment of an executive secretary to the CEC. However, the framework still needs to be redefined.

COMECE: I met twice with the leaders of COMECE, President Archbishop Hollerich of Luxembourg, and Secretary General Olivier Poquillon. COMECE intervenes at the level of the European Union with a clear political lobbying project. It is concerned about Catholic representation; it considers that Catholicism (almost 50% of Europeans) is under-represented in comparison with CEC and CEC member organisations present in Brussels (EKD office, CROCUE, Bishop of diocese in Europe). COMECE, while seeking bilateral relations, also expressed its concern about how collaboration is organized. We have agreed on a President and Secretary meeting to further analyse these issues.

CCEE: With the General Secretary, I took the opportunity of the first ecumenical opening celebration for the season of creation to encounter Cardinal Bagnasco and discuss how to restart a good working of the joint-committee CEC-CCEE. We agreed to organize a meeting in autumn 2019, to work on the reception of *Charta ecumenica* and to reflect on how churches should deal with fears, populism, dissatisfaction.

EKD office: I had the opportunity to join a meeting in the EKD office in Brussels, which welcomed a EKD delegation (foreign office, Synod...). The General Secretary and I gave a presentation where CEC stands now and how CEC will implement its work after the General assembly of Novi Sad.

So far, I have had no contacts with CROCEU, and the Evangelical office in Brussel.

III. Representation, conferences and other events

1) WCC 70th anniversary (17 + 21 June)

I attended twice the general council of WCC held in Geneva. The first meeting was on the 17th of June for the Celebration in Saint Peter. The message was

given by His Holiness Bartholomeus 1st. It was a brief opportunity to greet him and thank for his kind words on my election. The 2nd meeting was on the 21th of June, on the occasion of the visit of Pope Francis to the Ecumenical Centre. The media reported widely his message of the ecumenical journey and the place of witness in it.

Ecumenical celebration in Assisi (31 August-1 September)

To start the season of creation, for the first time this year, an ecumenical journey in Assisi was organized. It started with a contemplative prayer in front of the shrine of renunciation, then came an evening prayer in Santa Clara (before the cross of Assisi) and it ended with a public event in front of the Basilica, celebrating the beginning of 3 days' pilgrimage to Guido. It was an opportunity to meet Cardinal Bagnasco and to discuss the future of the CEC-CCEE joint committee

Farewell Dine Fecht (Hanover, 6 september)

It seemed important to me that CEC should participate in the farewell of Oberkirchenrätin Dine Fecht, and in the installation of Oberkirchenrat Frank Kopania at the Head of the foreign office of the EKD. I was thus able to thank EKD for the support provide to CEC's work and working mechanism. I had the chance to meet Michael Bunker (General Secretary of CPCE) and discuss with him the CEC-CPCE cooperation, especially the issue of the Frank Dieters successor.

GA CPCE (Basel, 13-18 September)

The CPCE General Assembly brought together about 100 delegates and was held in Basel Cathedral. Many theological texts have been received or adopted (ecclesial communion, religious plurality, theology of the diaspora, continuing education of pastors, reproductive medicine). On the basis of a report, a declaration of intent was signed, opening the prospect of a dialogue with the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity on the theme "Church and ecclesial communion". For the first time, the Catholic Church is engaging in a dialogue with a communion of Church and recognizing the model of unity in diversity promoted by the Leuenberg Agreement. The theological work carried out on the deepening of ecclesial communion reaches its limit (the resistance of the Churches to transfer some of their competences). Instead, the CPCE will focus its work on ethical and societal issues.

Several goals and working areas raised in the final report of the General Assembly are to be linked to CEC: dialog with Orthodox, work on the relation with the Anglican churches (Meissen, Reuilly, Porvoo), and social issues. I brought CEC's greetings to CPCE's general assembly and underlined our willingness to continue the CEC and CPECE cooperation, which was also subject of informal discussions.

Klingenthal colloquium of ICCS (3 October)

Invited by Peter Schreiner, I took part in the Klingenthal colloquium organized by the Inter European Commission on Church and School. I presented a project

on interreligious and intercultural education in school led by the Union of Protestant Churches in Alsace Lorraine, and also CEC and how CEC will implement its work after the General Assembly.

CCME and Deutsche Diakonie Asylum conference in Greece (17-18 October)

After an impressive, for some depressive, visit in Chios, the conference took place in Athens. Professors in political science, journalists, lawyers, analyze the policy and treatment of the Greek and EU institutions on migration issue, especially on the Greek islands. They showed how asylum procedures are beyond international and legal standards. In an opening speech, I underlined the agreement CEC – CCME 2017 and some aspects of the public issue from Novi Sad. Being thankful for the close cooperation CEC-CCME, I emphasized, by my participation, CEC's interest and commitment in CCME working area. We had also the opportunity to meet with archbishop Hieronymus II of Athens and Greece.

Forum Chrétien Francophone, Lyon 28-31 October 2018

In order to replicate the model of the Global Christian Forum at the regional level, a first Francophone meeting was organized in Lyon. It brought together 230 participants from all ecclesial families (50% of the participants were from historical churches, 50% from new churches). This very stimulating meeting is a real ecumenical encouragement. The public evening was attended by more than 600 participants; I was able to present the CEC, discuss the Novi Sad General Assembly and its themes, and invite people to pray and act in the face of the challenge of the upcoming European elections.

Conference "Rediscovering the common good" (Brussels, 6 November)

Invited by the *Jesuit European Social Center (JESC)* and the *Chapel for Europe*, I had the opportunity to contribute with Bishop Hollerich to a panel discussion after a keynote speech of Herman Van Rompuy. I emphasized CEC's paper "What future for Europe" and underlined the churches concern about rediscovering the values of the European founders.

The Centenary of first World War's end (10-11 November, Berlin)

The event was organized by the evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Schlesische Oberlausitz and the Catholic Archdiocese of Berlin. Four youth choirs, coming from England, France, Russia and Germany prepared together a peace concert in the Dom of Berlin. It was followed on Sunday morning by an ecumenical service in commemoration of the end of the first world war and prayer for peace and reconciliation. In his message, Bishop Dröge, reminded us of the commitments of the *Charta ecumenica*.

After Brexit colloquium (London, 16 November)

The Colloquium was organized by the Archbishop of Canterbury in cooperation with the Chair of EKD Council. The discussion went along the following themes: the church and the unity of society (with a special focus on the social roots of

the Brexit issue), the churches and the unity of Europe, the unity of European churches (Fr Heikki participated on this panel). Considering its roots, its consequences and how other internal political issues were decisive, it became obvious that Brexit is a far broader concern for Churches in Europe.

To be remembered

Solidarity with Spanish church: After the video on the discrimination of Spanish retired pastors shown during the Novi Sad General Assembly, which was widely diffused in September, CEC sent out a letter which called for solidarity with them.

Invitations declined

- I was unable attend the International Conference organized in Armenia on "The Holy Scripture in a Changing World" by the Apostolic church of Armenia and the United Bible society (27 to 30 September).
- For family reasons, I had to give up travelling to Würzburg to attend the Synod of the Evangelical Church of Germany (11 - 14 November).