

Conference of European Churches Governing Board

Brussels, 22-24 November 2018

2018 Novi Sad General Assembly – Evaluation Report

1.1 GENERAL INFORMATION

This evaluation report consists of two main parts. The first part offers a picture of how the 2018 Novi Sad General Assembly took place in terms of concrete numbers with description of some of the main elements of the organisational process.

In the second part we have stated the outcomes of the evaluation process based on the evaluation questionnaires that was distributed to the participants and involved staff. We have also listed the outcomes of the CEC Staff evaluation meeting that took place in a workshop format in Belgium from 10 to 11 September 2018.

1.2 PARTICIPATION FIGURES

Below you can find some detailed figures related to the participation in the General Assembly. To better understand these figures, we have to underline that the total number of participants (502) involves all the people, we as organisers had to deal with. Some of them were only invited for few days or only to special events and some did not even require accommodation and/or catering. The Assembly Staff included the CEC and co-opted staff, the Worship Committee, as the Serbian local team and volunteers.

Between 28 to 31 May we had ca. 100 participants present in the Youth Pre-Assembly Event as stewards, youth advisors, young delegates, speakers and facilitators.

- Total participants: 502
 - Delegates: 142
 - National Councils of Churches: 14
 - Organisations in Partnership: 11
 - Advisors: 37
 - Observers: 18
 - Officials: 16
 - Speakers: 14
 - Workshop Facilitators: 13
 - Guests: 57
 - Stewards: 46
 - Press: 24

- Assembly Staff: 93
 - Choir: 17
- Geographical origin of participants:
 - Central East: 25%
 - Central West: 14%
 - East: 3%
 - Nordic Baltic: 15%
 - North West: 16%
 - South: 10%
 - South East: 9%
 - International areas: 8%
 - Number of Member Churches present: 83
 - Total number of nights spent by participants in Novi Sad: 2589

1.3 FINANCES

Expenditures: The final budget of the General Assembly has been approved by the Governing Board with a total amount of 1.175.900 euros. This has been planned as a two-year budget (2017-2018) including all related preparatory and staff costs. Based on the real figures as of 30 September 2018 we expect to stay under this total expenditure figure.

Though these figures in expenditures seem comfortable, I have to mention that only vast efforts in negotiations, savings on catering, accommodation and infrastructure prices could balance uncontrolled spending in some areas. A review of CEC's internal policies and procedures of how to authorise its colleagues to engage in activities that result in costs regarding a budgeted project, otherwise it is difficult to take ownership and responsibility as a project leader.

Revenues: Regarding total revenues, we have overachieved our targets thanks to Member Churches and local authorities' contributions. Unfortunately, a number of delegates' fees and minimum fees are still not settled by some of the Member Churches. Taken all these facts into consideration a final financial report will be available in 2019.

Youth Assembly: A successful fundraising ensured 73.000 euros as earmarked contribution for the Youth Event from some Member Churches. This means that this event has been fully funded by external resources.

1.4 ORGANISATION PROCESS

Regarding the process of organisation, tasks were distributed into smaller teams that took care of specific aspects of the project such as:

- Infrastructures
- Programme
- Relationships/fundraising
- Participants management
- Communication
- Worship
- Finances
- Youth

We incorporated the local volunteers as well as co-opted staff members from the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and other organisations into the teams already in the preparatory period, which proved to be a great help and resulted in a harmonic and professional co-operation during the event.

Ms Charlotte Belot as Assembly Assistant and Mr Danilo Mihajlovic as Local Coordinator proved to be the main driving forces of the organising process.

1.5 CO-OPERATION WITH LOCAL CHURCHES AND THE LOCAL TEAM

The 2018 Novi Sad General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches was hosted by the local churches in Novi Sad, Serbia. The main host, the Serbian Orthodox Church, showed great willingness and effort to help CEC in the realisation of the organisation of the General Assembly.

The Serbian Orthodox Church involved its parishioners and sent us 35 local team members to help during and before the event. Many of them were involved for a year in each of the work areas. Without their local knowledge and help, it would have been much more difficult to organise the event smoothly.

We would also like to acknowledge the help and involvement of Rev. Ana Palik-Kunčak, from the Evangelical Methodist Church in Serbia.

2.1 FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION: THE PROCESS

The evaluation has been divided between the participants of the General Assembly and the Assembly staff.

a) Participants evaluation process

The participants of the General Assembly received an online evaluation questionnaire on 25 June 2018 by email. Responses were collected on 27 August. This evaluation included a set of 20 questions, mainly asking them to rate different items of the General Assembly. All questions were mandatory. Areas that were rated included:

- A. Meeting structure and consensus model
- B. Documentation
- C. Discussion and thematic plenaries
- D. Discussion in workshops and sub-groups
- E. Agenda timing
- F. Balance between business and fellowship
- G. Hospitality
- H. Worship life
- I. Practical information

The survey ended with open questions related to the General Assembly in general, the programme, fellowship, and suggestions.

b) Staff evaluation process

The staff evaluation was divided in 2 sections.

- i. The first one is, similar to the participants' evaluation, an online evaluation questionnaire, sent on 16 July 2018 to all Assembly staff. Responses were collected on 30 August. The questions in the evaluation were not mandatory, as not all of the assembly staff was present during all parts of the General Assembly. Areas rated and open questions included:
 - A. Overall impressions
 - B. Infrastructure
 - C. Agenda/Programme
 - D. Communications
 - E. Youth Pre-Assembly
 - F. Personal experience
- ii. The second evaluation for the staff included only CEC staff, carried out at the staff team building meeting in Maredret Abbey, Belgium from 10 to 11 September 2018. During these two days, with the help of 2 coaches (Pierre-Yves and Laure Gerard), CEC staff was able to identify what worked and what didn't

work in small groups of five. They listed all of these items in different categories related to their area of work.

2.2 EVALUATION FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

A. Organisation

Overall, the participants were **happy** with the practical organisation of the General Assembly. The transportation arrangements were highly satisfactory, and hospitality was described by 86% as excellent. The hotels and venues were appreciated as well. An improvement could have been made on the food, where there were only few vegetarian and vegan options, that can be *boring* after 10 days.

B. Programme

Parts of the programme that were most appreciated were:

1. Thematic plenaries, especially the Witness plenary by Archbishop Antje Jackelén
2. Plenary on migration
3. Workshops
4. Meetings in small groups and the discussions
5. Worship life

Different concerns were expressed regarding the programme of the General Assembly. The **tight schedule** made it difficult for some participants to fully enjoy the event. More time should have been given for **free time**, in order for them to connect and network with other participants.

The balance between business and fellowship was more or less sufficient, as many of them would have appreciated more free time in order to connect with the rest of the participants.

They would have appreciated to have more documents beforehand, to prepare with their church. They regretted that the website came half a year later, and that they didn't have enough time to read all the documents.

Plenaries: Also, participants had issues regarding the **preparations** of the business plenaries. The delay in the **delivery of the documents** (both before the General Assembly and during the plenaries) held back the delegates and participants in the smooth running of the different plenaries. Moreover, some paperless participants felt they were disadvantaged as the paper versions were ready before the online version. Also, it was not clear to all of them the difference between the "participant" and the "delegate" section and where to find the documents needed on the **website**. Indeed, many of them found the platform **hard to navigate**. It is good to note that they found the documents provided mostly informative.

Committees: Many comments on the evaluation forms were about the work of the committees and their running. The participants involved in the committees found that they could have been **prepared better**. Indeed, they would have appreciated a formal letter **informing** them they had been chosen, and also some guidance on **how** and **what** to do in the committee. Some participants also regretted the fact that it wasn't clear how they could have been **involved** in a committee (how to show their interest). Finally, according to them, they had no **possibilities to meet** in the evenings with other participants, as many of them worked in the committees until night.

Worship: Worship was highly **appreciated** by the participants (95%). The opening worship and the peace walk along the Danube were mentioned by many. However, a remark was made regarding the choice of the songs, that was "too much focused on western tradition".

C. Decision-making process and moderation

Among those who answered the evaluation questionnaire, 79% partially agreed and 48% completely agreed that there was a **full participation** in the decision-making process. Half the participants thought that the discussions were focused, although some of them would have appreciated a **firm chairing**, to avoid over-running. A suggestion was made on having better prepared moderation and a less tight schedule, in order to avoid over-running and to have **more space for discussion** during the plenaries. The **time** given to agenda items was not found sufficient. Many of them insisted on the importance of **interactions** within the plenary room, that was not emphasised enough at the General Assembly.

Comments were made about the **consensus**, which some thought could have been better used than voting cards.

D. What is the positive to remember?

It is important that the majority of the comments were **positive** regarding this General Assembly. The participants enjoyed a lot the **worship life**, as well as the **fellowship** (meeting other Christians). They enjoyed the nice and **relaxed atmosphere** of the General Assembly and the **informal encounters**. They appreciated the possibilities to **discuss** and to hear the different **perspectives** on issues from different churches and nations. They appreciated the **Serbian hospitality**, the chance to discover Novi Sad and Serbia and to be able to **network** with the fellow participants.

They appreciated the work, as they "were given responsibility and trust". Most of them felt prepared before the General Assembly, mostly due to previous experience.

E. What are the suggestion to learn from?

They suggest to have more time for **small discussions** and **interactions**, as well as for actual **debate** and policy making. The better **preparation** of the business plenaries and the **availability of documents** is primordial for the smooth running of the plenaries. The preparation of the moderator and the need for a **strong chairing** was also pointed out.

In order to use the online platform better for the documents, an idea is to have some kind of **notification** with a **direct link** by email when a **document** is ready.

The work of the **committees** needs to change (it was marked as disrespectful for staff and members)

They would appreciate to have some **free time** scheduled in the agenda. In accordance, they would appreciate to have some kind of **cultural visit**. They also suggest to have the big **outing** in the **middle** of the week, instead of the last evening when many participants have already left. Finally, a suggestion was made to have a **Thank-you wall**.

It is also very important in the future, to inform the participants on how to **involve** them in the **networks**/working groups of CEC. Many were also interested in how to involve **Member Churches** between the assemblies.

2.3 EVALUATION OF THE STAFF

I. Staff questionnaire

A. Overall impressions

The assembly staff **enjoyed** the most overall **atmosphere** and feeling of the General Assembly. They appreciated **meeting** other people, as well as the good **team spirit** and **team work** that was present during the event. They enjoyed making a **contribution** to the work of CEC and the General Assembly.

The things they **dislike** most was the fact that there was **little time** for content **discussions** due to the **tight schedule** and the **long days** (both for participants and staff). Also, they could notice a **difference of engagement** within the CEC staff: “the impression that CEC staff are not all engaged in the same way”, “inequality in personal commitment within the staff”.

The venues, board and lodging were good to most of them. Some remarks were made that it could have been easier if there weren't so many hotels, venues, and if we had chosen a city with an airport. For the participants' team, transportation was a big issue, that took the time of many people when they could have been useful at other tasks.

Otherwise, they qualified the practical **organisation** as **extraordinary**.

B. Programme

Regarding the different themes, speakers and other parts of the event, they thought it was mostly good. They noted the very good quality of the worship life.

Many were **not happy** about the business **plenaries**, impacted by the **late** arrival of the documents and that the agenda was too full, **limiting** the **discussion** time. Also, “a lot of time was spent in procedural issues”, and the fact that legal advisors were given too much power. Someone noted the drop out of main speakers, questioning is “CEC are not important/relevant enough?”.

C. Communication

The communication (press release, social media, website, etc.) was described as poor before the General Assembly, very good during the General Assembly and mostly good after. The **assembly website** was **criticised** by many, as not ready on time, not user friendly for the participants. They would have appreciated if the results, documents and decisions of the General Assembly could have been spread more widely amongst the participants after the event.

D. Youth

The Youth Pre-Assembly was saluted for its **success**, **good atmosphere** and for the **opportunity** it was for youth to engage before the General Assembly. The training with

the stewards was good, even though some teams could benefit for more time (30 min wasn't enough). The staff enjoyed working with them, even though some teams (such as registration team) needed them since day one, when registration was taking place, instead of day four when they were available, when it was almost over.

They noted that the youth involvement was very **encouraging** and **important**, that they were taken **more seriously** than in the past years. However, some still found that there was **not enough space to hear their ideas** in discussions.

E. Personal involvement

Most of them felt **good** about the amount of work they've had, even though some thought it was too much or not balanced.

They also noted the importance of **free time** as staff. One comment: "It was a pity that I could only have one free hour to go in the city during the 12 days that I was in Novi Sad".

They **enjoyed** their role, and "having more responsibilities". They evaluated their involvement before the General Assembly as not so much involved and very involved during the General Assembly.

Suggestions were made for **better communication in advance** (briefing of team), but also less lectures and more **participatory work methods**. It is important, for the next Assembly to make sure that we all know **who is doing what** so people can address them directly. It would also be good to "make it clear whether executive staff are supposed to help with all organisational tasks or are supposed to network. In the second case, have more field people to help administrative staff with organisational tasks."

They also noted that the work of the committees need to be planned differently.

II. Staff Retreat comments

a. Planning process

On the **documentation** process, it was stated that the documents should be available six months ahead. It is important that deadlines should be kept. In this case only a paperless Assembly is a possible option. A functioning and user-friendly **website** is necessary, as well as a concrete plan for communication.

Professional **agencies** are necessary for some parts of the organisation. We should be able to outsource to event professionals. **Practicalities** needs to be taken into account, such as an airport close by, training of stewards.

Timing of the agenda is crucial, we need to have enough time for the **committees** and to provide them with a framework. Also, it is relevant to have binding documents on what the Assembly Planning Committee (APC) and the staff have to deliver.

“Let’s start the next General Assembly right now.”

b. Governance

Regarding the **APC**, it is important to define their **mandate** and their work-plan. Also, we should consider the **competencies**. It would be helpful for the staff to clarify the **responsibilities** of the Governing Board, APC and staff.

For the **Committee** work, it is important to consider staff **involvement**, as well as improve nomination **processes** and **prepare** their work in advance.

Also, the role of **legal advisers** needs to be revised.

Youth involvement should be 20%, and the Youth Pre-Assembly should remain.

The Assembly Coordinator should start **two years** prior to the General Assembly.

2.4 MATERIALS

Materials can be accessed under resources on the CEC website:

<https://www.ceceurope.org/resources/assembly-2018/>

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