



Conference of European Churches Governing Board

Strasbourg, 15 – 18 May 2019

Summary of consultation's feedback

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I. Statistics

CEC received 22 contributions: 14 from Member Churches, 4 from National Council of Churches and 4 from Organisations in partnership. Among the Member Churches, 10 came from protestant churches and 4 from the Anglican family. We regret that the time allocated to reply to our survey was not sufficient for more members to send in their contribution, this may explain why we did not receive a reply from our Orthodox membership. Mainly larger Member Churches responded to the consultation.

Among these feedbacks, a small number just sent a short message, but most of them made a serious analysis of the drafted Strategic Plan and went back with interesting consideration extending in some cases from 3 to 4 pages of remarks.

II. General consideration

The idea to consult CEC members and Organisations in Partnership was unanimously welcomed. Responding people were very grateful for the opportunity to be part of the wider consultation process.

Generally, those who answered considered the drafted Strategic Plan as very “ambitious, inspiring and essential call to discipleship and witness in Europe today”. They also found it “wide-ranging”, “dealing with urgent matters”, “a courageous agenda”. In view of the long list of topics and plans, some wished CEC good luck and much support for the years to come. They wondered whether this strategy as such can be regarded as realistic and how CEC wants “to cope with all these topics in a meaningful way”.

The concept with the aims was considered as to be an appropriate response to the current situation for the churches in Europe. Some were even more enthusiastic: “the three main aims highlighted in the plan should be of high strategic importance for the Churches in Europe”.

Especially smaller churches expressed their gratitude for this ambitious plan, far away from their own capacity, and thanked CEC for the work done also in their name.

III. Methodological criticisms

1. Nature of a strategic plan

Some had real difficulty to see the draft document as a “strategic plan”. They saw it as a rather long list of topics, sometimes activities, coming from a public issue committee, or an individual staff work plan. But found no real priorities, neither a sense of urgency. “We would have liked to detect more sense of urgency in view of the tectonic changes which are taking place in today's world, politically, economically and ecologically.”

“A Strategic Plan is something that helps an organisation to make informed decisions about its priorities, and therefore what it will do and what it won't do, and what has overriding priority among all the things it might do. It is based on an assessment of what kind of ‘impact’ the organisation can have, how it can make a difference in its particular context. It therefore hinges on objectives that are phrased as outcomes.” Therefore, it

needs to differentiate between what CEC does and what CEC wants to achieve, “between objectives which are “business as usual activities” and those which are really measurable objectives, between those which are activities concerning primarily the daily work of the staff and those are the goals of the Governing Board itself, as the strategy setting body of CEC.”

One church considered there are too many headings in this “purposefully ambitious” plan and wished a clearer prioritising by bringing together several activities listed underneath the different pillars. Another church recommended that “CEC should take into consideration what added value their key tasks are”.

Others found the draft plan concentrates too much on the “what” question. “A full-fledged Strategic Plan also needs to address the ‘how’ question; how will the various topics be tackled and by ‘whom’”. Some added, in regard to CEC’s staff, the drafted plan not realistic enough. Therefore, some recommend to be more precise on who is involved in each action. “CEC will, does it mean ‘the staff will...’, ‘the Presidency will...’, ‘the Governing Board will...’, ‘some people from Member Churches will...’ or ‘the Member Churches will...?’”. It would be wise to differentiate between representative, programmatic and cooperative work.

Further, the silo presentation, “as starting from the different “desks” in CEC, also seems to hinder seeing the interconnectedness of many issues in your lists.”

Thus, the Governing Board should ensure that the final Strategic Plan figured better out:

- 1) What are the real priorities, giving to understand what is urgent for CEC?
- 2) What are the objectives (what?), the activities (how?), outcomes (operational objective), and by whom (who?).

Further, it might be helpful, to phrase out 4 or 5 strategic goals of the Governing Board, as a general heading over the whole Strategic Plan.

2. Three aims and Constitution of CEC

One church raises the question how the three aims are linked to CEC’s Constitution. “It could be useful to reflect in which ways the threefold structure of the draft Strategic Plan relates to the aims of CEC as stated in the Constitution Art 2.1.3: *The Conference commits itself, on the basis of the conciliar process of justice, peace and the integrity of creation, to continued work in particular in the following thematic areas: ecclesiology and theology; diaspora and migrant Churches, and mission; asylum and migration; youth and intergenerational dialogue; social responsibility and human rights.*”

The same church also mentioned “there are some new themes, accents, or fields of work mentioned (e.g. a kind Erasmus program, WCC Assembly 2021, Global Christian Forum, diversity and pluralism, intercultural learning, interreligious dialogue expertise, digitalisation and artificial intelligence, youth...). It is somehow unclear how CEC intends to engage deeply and sustainably in these areas without leaving aside other activities. It light be useful to mark very clearly which of these objectives are in fact maintaining existing activities, which are new ones, which should be downsized or phrased out.”

3. A more explicit link to the General assembly

Another consideration needs to be taken into account. How is the Strategic Plan related to the commitments of the Novi Sad General Assembly, especially to the very concrete challenges and recommendations of the Public Issue Committee document? It might be wise to quote some of the main aspects of this document.

As a reminder, the Public Issue Committee document from Novi Sad raises the question of "Economic and climate justice", "Security and EU Policies", "Arms production and export", "Just Peace and Non-Violence", "Refugees and Migration", "Human rights", "Populism", "Family".

Thus, the Governing Board should decide if it would be wise to introduce some references to the "Public issues document" and to the "Strategy and Policy paper" of the 2018 General assembly.

IV. Concerns

1. Youth

One of the recurrent concerns is the attention paid to the inclusion of youth. The aim to include 20% of persons of the age 18 to 30 in all our thematic reference groups, task forces, and events are presented is very appreciated. Some "noted with enthusiasm the inclusion of youth" but "remarked with some concern that there is no specific field of work on youth." A more formal remark would suggest to mention this purpose in the beginning of the plan and not at the end. Some raise the question, how CEC will ensure that "gender balance and youth participation"!

One church, considering that young people are very worried about climate changes and that youth of today are the ones who will be both deeply affected by them and also having to pay the high price for them, suggested to include specifically youth in the word area of climate justice. "The Strategic Plan has to take into account the concerns of young people today, and doubtless of tomorrow."

2. Social and work area

Several answers noted the absence of a classical area in which CEC was strongly committed, that of social justice and future of work. Does this also mean that CEC will no longer be committed to the CALL network and support it decisively?

3. Xenophobia

Several Member Churches underlined that populism ranks high on the agenda in the Public issues statement of the General assembly and should have a more prominent position in the Strategic Plan. One answer raised the issue of new forms of antisemitism in several European countries.

One church discerned a clear priority "variously described in the draft plan in terms of xenophobia, universal rights, education, diversity". Therefore, the recommendation is to bring together: building peace and reconciliation in Europe, supporting interreligious

dialogue, educating on diversity and plurality, being church together with migrant and minority churches, promoting human rights, freedom of religion or belief.

4. Economic and ecological justice

This work area was mentioned in several answers. Churches pay attention to this issue. "It could even be argued that this particular theme should be an aim in itself and become aim number four!"

Then, there were several concrete proposals:

- to introduce the expression "climate change",
- to find a way to engage work with youth and commit them more to that area,
- to connect CEC's work on economic and ecological justice to agenda 2030 by taking into deep and serious consideration "the 17 Global goals for sustainable development as a framework for changes that creates hope and urges action in a time of great challenges, also for the churches in Europe."
- To let the September 2019 Climate Summit in the UN Headquarters in New York give effects on the CEC Peace Conference in Paris, as they will take place almost at the same time.

5. Organisations in partnership

Nearly all Organisations in partnership noted that "in general, there is no real place in the plan for them". They expressed their will to look "forward towards a closer cooperation with CEC" and a real contribution to its work. Therefore, they would have wanted to be explicitly mentioned in the Strategic Plan. Especially, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) should be mentioned in the frame the aim 1.

6. Communication strategy

The Governing Board also must acknowledge the fact that a few Member Churches welcomed the proposal for a global communications strategy and underlined it. "Two keywords for this should be: how to involve the grass root and how to use the digital tools in a strategic way".

7. Work on Future of Europe

One answer expressed the hope that CEC could continue to work on its "Open Letter" and to develop more on the issue as to how we more coherently from a list of comely shared values to common action and ethical interventions.

8. Regional work

The approach to organise regional consultation on the "Future of Europe" was generally very appreciated and needs to be renewed at least once before the next General Assembly. Thus, the wish, often expressed during the Novi Sad General assembly, that CEC should become more relevant to Member Churches and develop more regional work. This is also linked to the question how to better involve small churches.

9. Ecclesiology

One church discussed the understanding of the term 'communion', considering it linked to the special agreement of church communion as established between most of the Lutheran, Reformed and Methodist churches in Europe.

One suggestion we would like to bring to your attention, is for CEC to organise a study process or conference on the topic of ecclesiology. Other recommend to continue the ecumenical work and to enlarge it towards charismatic and Pentecostal groups, explore possibility of interaction with Global Christian Forum.

10. Peace and reconciliation

One Organisation in Partnership made a deep analysis of the drafted strategic plan, raised several issues, and suggested some amendments in the way things were phrased out. It recalls that "Europe should remain a peace project and that just peace – not armed peace – and economic and ecological justice should be the European priorities. CEC is called to testify and witness to Just Peace!"

It therefore urged CEC to take in consideration the fact that the international nuclear treaties are being revoked, to advocate clearly toward the EU for soft power diplomacy rather than a 'hard one'. Thus, it also advocates to curb arms production and exports.

11. Missing features from former mandate

There are two missing features:

- 1) To establish a Peace Task Force was already decided by the former Governing Board.
- 2) To evaluate the reception of *Charta Oecumenica* was ordered by the Budapest 2013 General Assembly and reported as being under way in Novi Sad.
- 3) To recognise the diversity among churches in membership of CEC needs theological work. Thus, one church wondered how is it actually possible to come to commonly shared ethical statements and which role does our theology play in this!
- 4) One church noted that "the lack of overt attention to evangelism and discipleship is striking, especially as there are evident challenges and opportunities here that cut across national boundaries within Europe".

V. Concrete expectations

1. Meetings

- The hope that CEC will organise regular meetings with Organisations in Partnership
- The hope that CEC will organise regular meetings with ecumenical officers
- The wish not only to organise conferences, and work with Thematic reference groups, but also to work with other kinds of 'encounters', like mission trips, ecumenical joint ventures, serving together across cultures.

2. Thematic reference groups

- Church and Peace would strongly recommend to CEC to institute a new Reference Group on Peacebuilding and Reconciliation.
- Church and Peace would also strongly recommend to CEC to institute a new Reference Group on Economic and Ecological justice

3. Toward the next General Assembly

- One Church recommends the Governing Board to take into consideration to prepare a first draft before the next General Assembly, and submit for deliberation.
- One answer expressed frustration as former members of TRGs that the work undertaken in the months and years before the General Assembly was not reported or debated in plenary.

4. Concrete amendments

There were also many concrete amendments toward the way the draft Strategic Plan phrased items: e.g. saying rather relations with migrant and ethnic churches than dialogue.

VI. Financial consideration

One church wanted to draw the attention of the Governing Board, to the fact that historical churches in Europe are facing a general loss of members, which will bring them to reduce some cost in their budget. This will impact CEC who has therefore to work on its financial sustainability.