



Conference of European Churches  
Governing Board  
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Staff Work Plan &  
Thematic Reference Groups Proposal

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**1. Background**

According to the Standing Orders (18, 4-5) “executive staff shall be supported in (the thematic) areas by consultative bodies and/or working groups. In order to attend to the main thematic areas, permanent working groups will normally be the most appropriate instrument. For other purposes, ad hoc groups may be set up”. The Governing Board shall “upon proposal by the Members, appoint experts from the Member Churches to such bodies and/or groups. Such groups should have between five (5) and ten (10) members.”

The good functioning of Thematic Reference Groups (TRG) has been the subject of many discussions, both in the TRG’s evaluations prior to the 2018 General Assembly, and in relation to the Strategy Plan. Three basic observations from these discussions are that (1) each TRG needs to be accompanied by an executive staff member, that (2) the TRG members should represent adequate expertise and commitment to the task and that (3) part of this expertise is the variety of backgrounds and experiences of church life, such as confession, geography, lay/ordained, men/women, age, people living with disabilities, as well as relevant academic disciplines. To differentiate the new set of groups from the previous mandate period, it may be advisable to think of another term than Thematic Reference Groups, although this term does describe well the task of the organ.

The visible presence of young people at the 2018 Novi Sad General Assembly emphasized the need of a consistent policy of inclusion in CEC. Such policies are widely practiced by ecumenical and other international organizations, and they belong to the principles of the European Institutions. In this context, it is natural that the Governing Board pay attention to the balances mentioned above. For confessional balances, the CEC Constitution mentions the percentage (25%) of Orthodox members to be followed in the

composition of the Governing Board. No other figures are mentioned in the constitution with regard to other balances; many organizations follow the 40 % rule for gender representation and 20 % for persons of 18-30 years of age. The latter goal was achieved among the participants of the 2018 General Assembly. CEC has also to follow balances in terms of Anglican and Protestant confessions/churches as well regional representation. In view of the comprehensive character of the ecumenical vision and task, the balanced participation of persons with a variety of responsibilities, experiences and competences in church life influences the character and results of the work done.

It is to be noted that the TRG proposals by the executive staff cover only the key areas of work. It is the prerogative of the Governing Board to judge if some other programmatic areas may also need a specific group focusing on that area of work, such as science, bioethics and technology, or interreligious dialogue. In all instances, executive staff accompanying the groups needs to be taken into account.

## **2. Thematic Reference Groups proposed by staff**

### **2.1. AIM1**

#### **2.1.1. Education, democracy, diversity**

The two most important elements for creating a working group are diversity and experience in the field of education and intercultural dialogue. Following the practice of the Intergovernmental working groups of the Council of Europe, the Member churches are invited to design one representative of the highest possible rank in the field of education and intercultural dialogue. This larger working group prepares a work plan and timetable for the next few years. Included is the appointment of a Bureau and one or more subgroups or task forces when needed. A member should be appointed ex officio by ICCS (Inter-European Commission on Church and School).

- about 10 members
- including Executive Secretary/ Strasbourg office
- ICCS representative
- one or two youth representatives appointed by CEC
- meeting once a year

### **2.2. AIM2**

#### **2.2.1 Ecclesiology and Mission**

The programme will be carried out by the TRG on Ecclesiology & Mission that will be formed by the Governing Board. The composition of the group is crucial for the realisation of the Strategy Plan and the success of the programme. The group should be representative of the variety of Christian traditions constituting the CEC membership, but also the variety of Christian traditions existing on the European continent. The Committee will include a moderator and a steering group of five persons. There should be equal representation of male and female members and a balance of church traditions and European regions. There should be 25% Orthodox participation, and 20% youth participation.

In addition to members nominated by the CEC Member Churches, the programme would benefit from the participation in the work of the Committee of Consultants bringing

particular expertise and insights: the CCME Executive Secretary, the Secretary for Theology of the CPCE, a Consultant from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, a Consultant from the Pentecostal European Fellowship, a Consultant from the European Evangelical Alliance. The Governing Board may consider whether a representative from the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women, and a representative from the European youth organisations would enrich the work of the Committee, and reflect on ways to encourage Member Churches to nominate young researchers, and theologians living with disabilities.

### **2.3. AIM3**

#### **2.3.1 Economic and ecological justice and sustainable future**

In order to face these challenges and in following up commitments of the General Assembly 2018 CEC will create the working group on Economic and ecological justice and sustainable future. Working group will draw on expertise and experience offered to CEC for addressing challenges and concerns related to economic and ecological justice and sustainable future from CEC member churches. This will include concerns related to limits of the earth's capacity, lifestyle change, reduction of fossil fuels and ecological footprint, model of economic growth and criteria of sustainable development. Accents in the work of the group will be given to preparation of the dialogue of CEC related to above mentioned concerns with the EU and in cooperation with other ecumenical bodies, in particular the WCC for a churches' contribution to global addressing of concerns related to climate change and sustainable development, as they are in the agenda of the UN. Work in the group will require ability to participate on the dialogue of churches with politics, communication with experts from different fields engaged in work on climate change, ecological and economic justice and sustainable development.

Aims of the working group:

- Share and enhance expertise assembled in CEC member churches in addressing concerns related to climate change, ecological and economic justice and sustainable development
- Prepare and facilitate a dialogue of CEC with the EU on these and related themes and using opportunities for such a dialogue with EU
- Strengthen theological and ethical arguments related churches' concerns on climate change, ecological and economic justice and sustainable future; contribute to CEC becoming an actor shaping public theology and churches' contribution to a public space.

#### **2.3.2 Human Rights**

For this purpose, CEC would need devoted mix group of legal experts, political scientists and theologians coming from majority as well as from the minority CEC member churches and organizations in partnership. Previous expertise on the issues of human rights and freedom of religion or belief needs to be proven. The aim of the group is:

- To share the developments in the area of international human rights law with the emphasis on freedom of religion or belief and to be aware of human rights issues in their respective member church and region
- To assist working on the legal cases coming out as a request from the CEC member churches and its partners

- To participate in editing process of the CEC publications, statements on Human Rights
- To organize Summer School on Human Rights (2019-2023), Seminars at the EU institutions, Council of Europe, OSCE and UN
- To assist in the fundraising for the human rights work

### **3. Other task forces**

#### **3.1 Peace Task Force**

Proposal by the TRG on Peacebuilding and Reconciliation of the previous mandate period. As a Peace Task Force their action will essentially be as mediators of peace in the wider European and local contexts. This mediation work will be through CEC and its Member Churches. The task will be threefold:

- i. Responding to situations of Conflict
- ii. Peace-making
- iii. Peacebuilding

The Task Force will draw on experienced practitioners from different parts of Europe. There will be people who have experience in conflict mediation, its resolution, and those who bring peace-making and sustainable peacebuilding skills. Such practitioners will also have experience in training others, underpinning their practice and experience with their faith values and ethics in relation to peace. Initially the pool will consist of 16 people, each nominated by their Member Church. Ideally the pool will be drawn from a range of geographical locations, confessional backgrounds and have a gender balance. (see document of the TRG dated 19 October 2017)

#### **3.2 Other task forces**

It will be beneficial to develop a practice of Task Forces with focused tasks and brief tenures for particular tasks, as requested by the General Secretary or the Governing Board.

#### 4. Standing Orders on Thematic Reference Groups

##### § 18 Working mechanisms

- (1) The Conference shall pursue its work in thematic areas drawn from the aims and objectives of the Conference as laid down in the Constitution and elaborated in the strategic objectives and planning adopted by the General Assembly.
- (2) The Governing Board shall operationalise the strategic objectives adopted by the General Assembly and integrate them into a work plan for the Conference.
- (3) Generally, each of the thematic areas shall be assigned to a member of the Collegium or several of them jointly.
- (4) In order to facilitate the closest possible cooperation with its Members and a meaningful cooperation with Organisations in Partnership, as expressed in the partnership agreements, and with National Councils of Churches, executive staff shall be supported in these areas by consultative bodies and/or working groups. In order to attend to the main thematic areas, permanent working groups will normally be the most appropriate instrument. For other purposes, ad hoc groups may be set up.
- (5) In order to deliver the best possible support in any group, the Governing Board shall, upon proposal by the Members, appoint experts from the Member Churches to such bodies and/or groups. Such groups should have between five (5) and ten (10) members. Funding permitting, they can draw on external expertise. They are encouraged to build wider networks, in consultation with the executive staff responsible for their area of work.
- (6) Such networks can be recognised officially by the Conference and also become part of the working mechanisms of the Conference. The decision to recognise a network shall be taken by the Governing Board.
- (7) The Conference cooperates with the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) on the subject of asylum and migration in accordance with the commitments and obligations established in the Agreement of Cooperation between the two associations.
- (8) The General Secretary may, in consultation with the Budget Committee, establish working groups for limited periods of time to organise one-off conferences, seminars or dialogue sessions.
- (9) In all appointments of bodies and working groups, the Governing Board shall ensure a reasonable geographical and confessional balance; the desired distribution among church officials, parish ministers and lay persons; among men, women and young people; minority and majority churches; and participation by persons whose special expertise and experience will be needed in its appointments.
- (10) In drawing upon external expertise for its committees, groups and events, the Conference must seek close contact with the Member Churches to which experts are attached, in order to ensure a permanent and intensive flow of information.