



Conference of European Churches Governing Board Brussels, 20-22 November 2019

President's Report May 2019 – November 2019

Analytical executive summary

In May 2019, the Governing Board asked to have a brief analytical summary on the heading of the President's report. I summarise hereafter in six points, some belong more to the Presidents' report, other to the General Secretariat report. The narrative is presented below in a chronological manner.

Huge expectations in a large spectrum

CEC's strategic plan *Together in hope and witness* is very broad and covers a large spectrum. From ecumenical issues to social ones, from political to ecclesial ones, from religious to ethical ones. Although, after having sent out the call for Thematic Group, some criticism went back saying there is no Thematic Group on reconciliation, justice and peace, neither one on EU policy and legislation. Considering that CEC now organizes every 6-8 month a meeting on Art 17 TFEU and that we already know the lawyers to invite to monitor EU policy and legislation, one can say that the second critic is due to a lack of communication. But the first requires the Governing Board to reflect on how it will establish the Peace Task Force already decided by the former Governing Board.

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CEC needs a clearer profile

By contrast, this broad spectrum of projects and goals didn't show very clearly what CEC stands for. There is a need to profile CEC and CEC's image. The public issues statement from the 2018 Novi Sad General Assembly raises two major concerns: 1) the future of Europe and 2) reconciliation, justice and peace. A reconciled, cooperative and solidary Europe as well the commitment to work for justice and Peace have been and continue to be major concerns for Christians. Given the global political situation, peace was one of the major topics in the conferences or events I participated. The Governing Board will have to reflect on that in the frame of his strategy towards the next general assembly, in order also to give clear guidance for the new General Secretary.

Expectations toward CEC on the global level

I asked myself, whether it will be appropriate for CEC to participate in events on the global level, especially when they are not organised in Europe? During the G20 Interfaith Forum, I noticed that no organisation was able to bring in the particular European experience resulting of the reconciliation and integration process that happens since World War II, and that many are thankful to CEC for bringing this expertise to global events.

May-November 2019, a period of "maintenance "

The past six month have to be considered as a maintaining period. During the vacancy of the General Secretary position, Peter Pavlovic, as Study Secretary, took over the relations with the European institutions, Katerina Pekridou, ecumenical relations (WCC, CPCE, etc.). Véronique Engels was in daily contact with the President to raise questions for advice or decision. The organisation functions due to a deep commitment of all CEC staff, and particularly of Ms Véronique Engels whose workload reaches its limits. I guess all together we did well. Furthermore, the Governing Board has to be aware that since the restructuration of CEC (merger CSC, move to Brussels), CEC has 50% less staff, but continues to embrace the same spectrum of workload. Therefore, I think there is a real need of a change management to be more focused.

A financial fragility

During the past six months, we were able to work neither on a member fees strategy nor a fundraising one. Although, considering the update on the 30th of October, one can say that CEC will nearly reach the budgeted amount of membership fees. But the global financial situation remains tight. To balance the budget, the Treasurer planned to have cost-neutral Thematic Groups. This is in my view simply not imaginable, because it means that CEC can pay salaries, but no finance completely its work. I guess that there is an urgent need to start working on finance strategy.

An opportunity to reorganize CEC's administration

Since the start of Charlotte Vanderborght's sick leave in November 2018, I opened a dialogue with her to see whether she envisages to come back to CEC or not (the salary of Charlotte Vanderborght is covered by Belgian social security since December 2018). Upon advice of her doctor, she informed me that she will not come back to work for CEC. We are starting the procedure to end her contract. Furthermore, Ms Daisy Bielo, CEC's accountant, handed in her resignation. In consultation with the Treasurer, we organized an interim solution with our external accountant. The new General Secretary will have the opportunity to reorganise the finance administration.

President agenda May 2019 – November 2019

1) Synode Église Protestante Unie de France (30 May – 2 June, Grenoble)

The Synod was dedicated mainly to the revision of the constitution from 2013 and the functioning reports. The current priorities are Evangelism and witnessing the Gospel in a very secular society. EPUDF is in a triannual synodal process to clarify our churches' vision. Therefore, the Synod will work in 2020-2021 on "which ministries does God call for our church?", in 2021-2022 on "which mission does God call our church to?" and in 2022-2023 on "which changes do we need to do in our organisation in order to better serve this mission?". This process will include reflexions on 1. recreating a ministry of "diacre" (even though it might not be called that way), 2. the possibility to simplify the administrative part of Church governance in some places, 3. How to develop a dynamic process of change in the Church, 4. How to shift from a "control" culture to an "encouragement/incentive" culture.

2) G20 interfaith forum (7-9 June, Tokyo)

The G20 Interfaith Forum aimed to bring together a "network of networks", linking religious actors working on global issues within the broad framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It offers an annual platform for a network of religiously linked institutions to engage with policy leaders on global agendas. Bringing together more than 200 speakers, the G20 Interfaith Forum reached also a larger Japanese audience (4000+). The Interfaith forum worked on the theme "Peace, People, Planet: pathways forward". A short document with five topics has been finalised and presented as the Forum's priority recommendations to several G20 leaders. The five topics are: (a) working for peace with a new framing of religious roles in conflict and polarization. (b) a sharp focus on children backed by resources; (c) meaningful action and partnerships to protect rainforests; (d) strengthened rule of law and protection of human rights, with particular emphasis on freedom of religion or belief and action to fight against corruption; and (e) strengthened commitments to combat trafficking and modern slavery as a long-term G20 priority. On a panel "*Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue for Action*", I underlined the spirit and commitment of the *Charta Œcumenica* and several aspects of CEC's Strategy plan.

3) Collegium (12 June, skype)

Due to commitments in Strasbourg, I was not able to join the Collegium. Peter Pavlovic, having a status of "Study Secretary", took the lead of the Collegium. I joined via videoconferencing, mainly to clarify the way the office will function in the period without General Secretary. The President takes and assumes all decisions. The concrete communication goes via the General Secretary's assistant (Véronique Engels) daily. Peter Pavlovic being in charge of the General Secretary's tasks in relations with the EU institutions in Brussels (Presidency meeting, COMECE, etc.) and Katerina Pekridou taking over the ecumenical relations and work of the General Secretary (WCC, CCEE, etc.).

4) Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (17 June, Brussels)

I welcomed Archbishop Tapio Luoma of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland at the CEC office in Brussels. He was accompanied by Director General Pekka Huokuna and Lena Kumlin. The meeting was mainly dedicated to a presentation of CEC's work, where CEC stands after the 2018 Novi Sad General Assembly (strategic orientations, call for Thematic Groups, dismissal of General Secretary, ...) and the upcoming Finnish EU presidency. Archbishop Luoma showed a real interest for the dialogue with EU institutions in the frame of Art 17TFEU. I thanked the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland for their commitment and support to CEC.

5) Summer school on Human rights (17-20 June Lisbon)

Over 50 participants came together during the *Summer School on Human Rights* that addressed the theme "*freedom of expression in the time of rising populism*". Petr Kratochvil gave a brilliant presentation describing the phenomenon of populism. Mike Flood discussed the issue of fake news in modern culture and raised the concern of how churches can fight against them. Overall, the 2019 summer school was a great success, although it raises the question of how better to involve youth. In my opening speech, I welcomed participants with some reflections on the dilemma between freedom of expression and hate speech.

6) Kirchentag (20-23 June, Dortmund)

The German *Kirchentag* is a biannual event organised by a non-profit organisation bringing together more than 120 000 people. Churches and Church-related organisations from the whole country and broader, as well as German Politician consider it as their duty to participate. The theme in 2019 was “Was für ein Vertrauen” (What a trust). I used this opportunity to meet Mario Fischer (CPCE General Secretary), Katrin Hatzinger (head of EKD office in Brussels) and very briefly Bishop Petra Bosse-Hubert.

7) Meeting with Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Worthen (24 June, London)

Having to travel to Great Britain for the Protestant Churches of France, I took the opportunity to encounter Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Worthen. I shared with him some information about the situation of CEC. I expressed my gratitude for the commitment of Church of England to CEC (Bishop Guli and Bishop Nick, Fr Alwyn Pettersen, etc.). We also discussed the issue of the membership fees in light of the correspondence we had about that and agreed that Jeremy Worthen will appreciate whether it is wise to raise the question with the Synod or not. I underlined that the European project has arrived on a crossroads, and therefore cooperation of European Churches is more needed than ever. But also that I'm aware of the financial pressure in each of our Member Churches. We discussed as well the orientations of the vacancy notice to the position of General Secretary of CEC. Jeremy Worthen appreciated our orientations of the notice and promised to think about possible candidates to raise their attention to this position, both in Church of England and the wider network through the diocese in Europe and its agreement (Porvoo, Meissen, Reuilly). I suggested to meet the Synod of Church of England in the near future to exchange on CEC's work in a broader frame.

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8) Meeting WCC-IJCIC (25-27 June, Paris)

I participated in the meeting of 31 delegates from the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) and WCC to work on the theme of “*normalization of hatred*”. A very open and respectful dialogue took place, more on the question of antisemitism, and the Israel Palestine issue, than the normalization of hatred. The increase of Jewish hatred was globally notified, even in the United States.

Very good meeting, since real issues were approached in a respectful manner. The longstanding position of WCC (Jerusalem for 3 religions, and 2 States: all religions have the right to celebrate, to exist, to have property...) was expressed. Jewish rabbis and leaders were able to hear the Christian concern in the Israel-Palestine conflict. They also asked for support, because they alone do not feel able to address the issue of hatred against Jews. The question how to address the problem was discussed. As a result, IJCIC and WCC committed themselves to have regular dialogue and to work on a common visit to Israel and Palestine. I gave a contribution presenting the French situation of *laïcité* and underlining the need for interfaith cooperation on a global as well as on the grassroots level.

The meeting offered the opportunity to discuss several issues with the General Secretary of WCC and Central Committee members (Archbishop Vicken AYKAZIAN) belonging to CEC's participation on General assembly of WCC and the appointment procedure of the General Secretary of WCC.

9) Meeting with European Evangelical Alliance (28 June, Stuttgart)

Existing as a regional group since the 1950s, the European Evangelical Alliance (EEA) traces its roots to the 1846 conference at which the World Evangelical Alliance was established. The EEA exists to foster unity and evangelical identity and provide a voice and platform to evangelical Christians. Their members are either Churches (eastern Europe), or evangelical church councils (France), or individuals (sometimes evangelicals from reformed or Lutheran churches, e.g. in Swiss or in Germany). It is more a Network coordinated by a General secretary than an established office. In Brussel, the EEA is working via a "one-man office" only present 3 days a week. The EEA network addresses family ethics (procreation, end of life, sexuality...), Freedom of religions, Migration, Evangelisation in a multi-religious world (Mission), Gender issue, Populism, art. Jointly with their General Secretary (Rev. Thomas Bucher) and their President (Rev. Dr Frank Hinkelmann), we agreed to meet again to see whether it could be interesting to link the common working fields.

10) Meeting Art 17 (11 July, Brussels)

This meeting brings together Heads of Brussels offices of CEC's Member Churches and the General Secretary of CPCE (about 10 persons). I shared information about the current situation of CEC (General Secretary departure, vacancy notice, organisation of work, Strategy plan, Thematic Groups...). We discussed the results of the EU election and the perspective for the "top jobs", the Strategic agenda of the EU Council (2019-2024) and the perspectives of the Finnish presidency.

11) Meeting CPCE General Secretary Rev Mario Fischer (11 July, Brussels)

We presented to one another the strategic orientations of our respective organisations. Convened that CPCE will not work on a protestant ecumenical officers meeting but participate in CEC's even broader project (with orthodox and Anglican families). We discussed also the understanding of the letter send in march 2019 (see agenda of GB).

12) Meeting COMECE GS Poquillon (16 July, Strasbourg)

Knowing that Br Olivier Poquillon was in Strasbourg, I took the opportunity to encounter him. He was at that time outgoing General Secretary of COMECE. We made an assessment of common projects. A more opened discussion also helped me to better understand COMECE's working goals, mechanism and issues.

13) Meeting the Bishop of the Evangelical Church in Baden (17 July, Strasbourg)

The Evangelical Church in Baden has its headquarters in Karlsruhe. Dr. Cornelius Bundschuh will be the local hosting bishop for the coming WCC General Assembly. We discussed, among others, whether his church would be able to second a position of an Executive Secretary of CEC. The idea was positively received. Bishop Bundschuh can also imagine a cooperation with the Evangelical Church in Württemberg and/or Bavaria. We agreed that I will send a formal letter to the three Churches with the profile CEC is looking for.

14) Work on the administrative situation of Fr Heikki.

Work on the administrative situation of Fr Heikki Huttunen required a huge investment in time. We had lengthy discussions with him and with the lawyer on how to end the contract. From my point of view, the main difficulty lay in the fact that Fr Heikki was not able to make any decision or to sign what we orally agreed on. Finally, due to the fact that Fr Heikki sent us a certificate for sick leave, in consultation with the Vice-presidents, and as permitted by the Belgian law, we ended his contract unilaterally.

Another issue was that of Fr Heikki's debt and CEC's obligations toward the Finnish tax authorities. Our chartered accountant worked long hours to clarify the situation. We also had to work with Finnish lawyers to regularise CEC's situation in Finland. After numerous calls and call conferences during the summer, CEC's situation in Finland is now regularised and the issue of the debt is in the hands of our Belgian lawyer.

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15) Work Regulations

In Belgium all employers are required to draft Work Regulations. Work Regulations are an integral part of the staff members' contract. In June 2014, CEC's Governing Board adopted Work Regulations. But they never entered in force because the two former General Secretaries didn't finalise the legal procedures for approval. In 2016/17 the previous General Secretary created a working group within the staff of CEC to draft new Work regulations, but never finalised it. In June 2019, I took over that draft, checked with the Belgian social service what is required by Belgian law, identified also what was given by CEC in previous Work Regulations coming from the time before the restructuration, and finalised the document now submitted to the Governing Board.

16)The 10th World Assembly of Religion for Peace (20-23 August, Lindau)

Religion for Peace (RfP) is a global interfaith organisation founded in 1970. Considering that “doctrine divides, but action unites”, RfP works on justice and peace. As there is a science of war, RfP aims to develop a science of peace and to analyse the necessary condition for a Positive peace. The 10th World Assembly of Religion for Peace brought together more than 1 000 women, men and youth, representing 125 countries reflecting on the theme “*Caring for our Common Future—Advancing Shared Well-being.*” The Assembly was welcomed by the German Bundespräsident and honoured by religious leaders and Nobel laureates and adopted **The Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation**. I was invited by Thomas Wipf, former president of the Swiss Protestant church and CPCE, and now President for RfP Europe. He is willing to intensify cooperation with CEC, especially to cooperate in organizing a conference to map the cultural impact of AI. I had also the opportunity to encounter Dr Martin Hein, former Bischof von Kurhessen-Waldeck and now adviser to the Land of Hessen on AI, who is willing to host the conference and to provide substantial financial support.

17)Global exchange on religion in society (6 September, Brussels)

Ms. Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, convened a conference on the theme “Towards a Global Exchange on Religion in Society”. She presented her project to create in Europe a Global exchange on religion in society. The idea is to implement interfaith actors in proposing them a kind of Erasmus program to visit and discover all over the world good interreligious and intercultural project and practices. Elizabeta Kitanovic, participating on the panel “Religion and Society Approach – sharing of best practices and faith-literate approaches” mentioned several aspects of CEC’s work- and strategic plan.

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18)Hate speech (9 September, Paris)

On the invitation of his Eminence, Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, I contributed to a workshop he organised in Paris on the “Role Of Faith Leaders in Combatting Hate Crime”. Having explained the French background of *laïcité*, I developed the role of religious leaders as: 1) always give public signs of brotherhood, again and again, 2) Ensure that their religion fulfils its core or true mission, namely educating to goodness, 3) To act constantly for peace and justice, namely to challenge the rising populism crossover Europe.

19)CEC’s Peace Conference (10-12 September, Paris)

Commemorating the 60 anniversary of CEC and the 100th of the Versailles treaty, CEC’s Peace Conference brought together 60 participants in Paris. After an opening visit in Versailles with historical explanation provided by Johnston McMaster (member of the former CEC TRG on Peace and Reconciliation), the opening of the conference was honoured by the Vice-Presidents of the French and German Parliament, respectively M. Sylvain Waserman and Ms Claudia Roth. The conference explored the theme of peace from diverse perspectives, including the West’s legacy in the Middle East, populism, sustainability and economics. Although we met several organisational problems, its

content, appreciation of the participants and financial balance, made the conference a great success.

For me, the conference raises two questions: 1) Is peace sufficiently underlined in CEC's profile? 2) what about CEC's commitment to peace? In particular, how the decision to establish a Peace Task Force (taken by the previous Governing Board) should be implemented?

20) Budget committee (13th September, Brussels)

The Budget committee welcomed Karsten Simmer for a difficult meeting. Indeed, the chartered accountant CEC has sub-contracted in March, gave his dismissal with immediate effect shortly before the meeting. The committee therefor worked with no clear figures. With the Treasurer we made the necessary effort to find an adequate solution to provide the Governing Board with updated figures. Due to the fact that CEC is now working with its third chartered accountant, and also the fact that CEC lost the working files between the General assembly and May 2019 in a crypto virus attack, accounts are in a bad shape. We are currently working on restoring the files.

21) Sant' Egidio: "Peace with no border" (15-17 September, Madrid)

The community of Sant' Egidio invited me to participate in their annual meeting with the theme "Peace with no Border". I participated in a panel with a contribution on the theme "Development is the Name of Peace". It was an opportunity to underline the place peace and bridge-building has in CEC's history from its foundation to the Paris Peace Conference, and to explain that peace requires work on local and international level.

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Collegium (18th September, Brussels)

The agenda focused on the preparation of the Governing Board.

22) First meeting of Ecumenical Officers (24-26 September, Finland)

The First meeting of Ecumenical Officers and Secretaries for Theology served a two-fold purpose: deepening theological exchange among the Member Churches and promoting the mission of the Church. It brought together officers from the Member Churches of CEC who have responsibility for ecumenical dialogue and are therefore the resource persons to guide our work and give direction to CEC's programs. The invitation to the meeting was extended also to the Secretaries for theology of the WCC the CPCE. Although the invitation went out at very short notice, most of the churches delegated high level representatives and showed a deep interest for the ecumenical work in CEC.

23) Several meetings with the Evangelical Church of Finland (26 September,

24) Helsinki)

Being in Finland, I took the opportunity to encounter the ecumenical officer of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Kimmo Kääriäinen. He was very thankful to have some information about CEC's situation (dismissal of General Secretary). Having

presented the orientation of the vacancy notice, I asked him whether he sees some potential candidate and asked him to encourage them. We also discussed to question of the membership fees and the potential location of CEC's next GA. The Nordic Baltic region can imagine to host it, probably in Estonia for economic reasons. This question is on the agenda of the coming Nordic Baltic ecumenical officers meeting in March 2020. I also met Pekka Huokuna, the director General of the Church Council, and Lena Kumlin, Legal Advisor for European Affairs, to discuss a potential cooperation with CEC in their project to establish a part time office in Brussels (2 weeks per month).

25)Semi centennial Metropolis of Sweden and all Scandinavia (27-28 September, Stockholm)

His Eminence, Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden and All Scandinavia, invited me to participate in the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Metropolis of Sweden and all Scandinavia, honoured by the visit of His All Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeus. I had the opportunity to bring CEC's greetings and exchange with several guests, namely Archbishop of Uppsala and of the Evangelical **Lutheran** Church of Sweden, Antje Jackelén.

26)Presidency meeting (3 October, Stockholm)

The Presidency received and discussed the report on the President's activity, the report on CEC's activities and functioning, and prepared the agenda of the Governing Board. The Presidency also set the dates of the Governing Board meetings until the next General Assembly (unless an additional meeting is needed):

04-06 June 2020	27-29 May 2021	19-21 May 2022	23-25 March 2023
18-20 November 2020	25-27 November 2021	24-26 November 2022	

27)Collegium (14-15 October, Brussels)

For several reasons, not all Executive Secretary were able to join the meeting. Those present worked mainly on CEC's proposal for the WCC GA.

28)Conference “Alternative to Populism from human rights perspective” (17-19 October, Malaga)

Hosted by the Evangelical Church in Spain in the Ecumenical centre *Los Rubios*, nearly 60 participants joint this well-prepared conference with high-level representations (among others, the UN Human rights commissioner’s and an Ambassador from Spanish Foreign office representing KAICIID). The program included a contribution from the Jewish and Muslim perspective and resulted, due to the particular skilful work of Dr Patrick Schnabel, in a statement proposed for endorsement of the Governing Board.

29)Search committee (1st of July, 17 & 23-24 October, Stockholm)

According to the Standing Orders, the Search committee is composed of the Nomination committee and the President. The Committee meet through video conferences discussing how to ensure to have qualified candidates and how to organise a fair procedure. Six candidates applied for the position of General Secretary. Four were interviewed. Two of them are shortlisted to be interviewed by the Governing Board.

30)Collegium (6 November, Brussels)

The agenda focused on the preparation of the Governing Board, especially preparation of the activity reports of CEC staff, the elaboration of a first draft to submit to the Nomination committee for the Thematic Groups.

31)Semi centennial Metropolis Belgium, Luxembourg and Netherlands (9 November, Brussels)

Being informed of the visit of His All Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch to Brussel, Katerina Pekridou and myself have attempted to encounter His Eminence Metropolitan Athenagoras of Belgium since the beginning of the summer. Our goal was to see if it would be feasible to welcome the Patriarch in CEC’s Office. We were only received on the 18th September and had to admit that it was now very late to introduce such a visit in the agenda. We agreed that CEC’s President will be present in the Vesper of the 9th of November and get the opportunity to the welcome briefly the Patriarch. This was not the case. Even worse, CEC’s was at no moment mentioned in the speech of Metropolitan Athenagoras, although he, who was one of the moderators in CEC’s 2018 General Assembly in Novi Sad, has spoken explicitly about the ecumenical commitment of the Metropolis. I have drafted a letter, asking him for an encounter to discuss this concern.

32)Synod EKD (10-12 November, Dresden)

The Synod of the Evangelical Church in German met in Dresden under the theme „Auf dem Weg zu einer Kirche der Gerechtigkeit und des Friedens“ (on the journey toward a church of Justice and Peace). In a very busy agenda, with the help of OKR Frank Kopania, I had the opportunity, very briefly, to greet the Synod on behalf of CEC, to thank for their great support, and to underline CEC’s and the churches actual challenge in a changing Europe. The Synod had an intense discussion on the project of the EKD council to buy a ship for rescue in the Mediterranean see. The EKD runs also, since 2018, a work

program on sexual abuse with 11 goals. The report on that program, organised in a cooperative manner with the public authorities, and the presence of victims giving their witness were an intense moment.

33) Meeting of CALL network (14-15 November, Brussels)

The CALL network, previously coordinated by Frank-Dieter Fischbach, works on social issues, especially on the impact of digitalization. As a grassroots organisation, mainly bringing together representatives coming from a protestant background, they are waiting for a new coordinator. Having explained CEC's strategy plan, working mechanism, and also the ongoing procedure to appoint a new General Secretary, we discussed organisational points, namely how to better articulate with the TG Social justice and labour and the need of having an executive staff member for CALL. We also discussed several projects: to propose for the GA of WCC a Workshop on digitalisation, to organise a working session on digitalisation en November 2020, and a conference on digitalisation in March 2021 to be linked and coordinated with the project of a conference on Artificial Intelligence.