



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

### Youth advisor's report May 2019 – November 2019

#### ***Looking back at the GB meeting in May***

In May, the Governing Board (GB) decided that I should act as a link person between the GB and youth representatives. The aim is to set up a “youth desk” within CEC, starting by improving communication with ecumenical European youth organisations and by setting up a pool of youth experts in our member churches.

A special aspect of the last GB meeting was a youth meeting on the days before. Youth from our last General Assembly, from our electoral reserve as well as representatives from WSCF-E and EYCE participated both in the youth meeting and partly in the GB meeting. Even though I did not receive responses on my inquiries about how the participants experienced these meetings, contacts have improved significantly on a personal level. I was in contact with some of them during the last months and had the impression that both the awareness of CEC's work and a sense of belonging increased. This shows once again the importance of personal contact and meetings. The GB's decision to accept invitations to attend the board meetings of youth organisations and to invite youth representatives to another GB meeting in about two years' time is therefore highly valuable.

1

---

#### ***News from WSCF-E and EYCE***

The World Student Christian Federation Europe (WSCF-E) held its biannual European Regional Assembly from 3 to 8 October 2019 in Copenhagen, Denmark. A couple of representatives from WSCF-E's partner organisations were present, among them Anders Gaadegard representing CEC. The discussions with partner organisations concerned their respective activities, opportunities for young people to get involved, and opportunities for partnerships. The newly elected Chair for the next two years will be Christiane Gebauer from Göttingen, Germany.

The Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) held its biannual General Meeting from 16 to 20 October in Berlin, Germany. I participated both in one meeting, discussing the relation of EYCE and CEC, and also in the Alumni Gathering on Saturday and Sunday, celebrating EYCE's anniversary of 50 years and using the opportunity to talk to different “generations” of EYCE. It was mentioned several times that the relationship between EYCE and CEC have been difficult from the very beginning, as they address similar

churches and tasks, but are not linked on an institutional level. Since the end of the Cold War, EYCE hardly receives funding from churches and has to apply for EU-funds and others, which makes their work difficult. They have had no General Secretary since 2017 and struggle regarding both finances and activities. Hannah Weber from Potsdam, Germany, was elected as Chair for the next two years. Christiane Gebauer (Chair WSCF-E), Hannah Weber and myself decided to meet next year in order to discuss the future of ecumenical youth organisations in Europe.

### ***Communication***

One major challenge for ecumenical activities in Europe is communication; this is also true for communication with youth. I subscribed to the newsletters of both WSCF-E and EYCE and follow them on Facebook, however, news are rare. In its last meeting, the GB requested me to suggest names of young people with communications skills who could contribute to the work of CEC's communications taskforce. However, youth organisations are themselves struggling to coordinate communication, especially considering that all their work is done by volunteers in their free time. Therefore, the question of communication needs further development.

### ***A pool of young experts***

Bearing in mind that it was often not easy to get churches to nominate young experts for CEC activities, the GB decided to create a youth network / a pool of young experts in order to help CEC to achieve its aim of including 20% youth in all working structures, notably in thematic groups.

2

---

However, after looking up the different youth organisations and activities of our member churches, I realised that it would take quite some time to create such a network, and, as I just said, youth organisations have trouble to reach people even for their own activities. So at the beginning of September, I came up with a rather unusual, but hopefully effective idea. Remembering conversations with young persons at our last General Assembly, I decided to propose their names directly to some of our member churches for specific Thematic Groups. This was not meant to question the independence of our Member Churches in their nominations, but to come closer to our aim of 20% youth. In total, I recommended 10 persons for different groups. In all emails, GB members of the respective member churches were put in Cc.

For the future, I am still trying to think of a good way of creating a "youth pool". Firstly, this pool should not become a CEC-specific youth organisation; it will be better to cooperate with organisations that exist already. Secondly, the "fluctuation" of youth is very high as they represent the age of 18–30 years. Thirdly, they should be in a close relation with their member churches, we will not be able to have any influence on this. Last but not least, finances and time is always difficult for young adults, especially, if they are not working for a church.

### ***Suggestions for future proceedings***

Following the Youth Message from CEC's last General Assembly, it is very positive that the GB works towards a strengthening of the role of the youth in CEC's work. However,

if CEC wants to develop this in an effective and sound way, and also cooperating with the already existing youth organisations, this will take some time. I am not so sure anymore whether a pool of experts is the best method. In addition to the challenges that were already mentioned, compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and taking care of “alumni” will play a role.

In my eyes, youth can enrich our perspectives on current issues in church and society. We should, ideally in close conjunction with the Communication Strategy, think of a good way of sending specific invitations to young people and also of securing funds for their travel expenses.