



Governing Board
Agenda Item: 5
Document Name:
1GB2020_DOC5 PRESIDENTS' REPORT
Purpose: For information

Presidency report

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Conference of European Churches
Conférence des Églises européennes
Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen
Конференция Европейских Церкве

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I. Summary

In my activity as President, since the last meeting of the Governing Board, one can easily distinguish three very different periods: a time until the end of December when I continued to ensure a form of interim in the absence of the General Secretary, a time from January until early March marked by the accompaniment of the new General Secretary handing over to him his functions, a time since the beginning of March marked significantly by the pandemic and health crisis. This report raises several questions of strategic relevance, two of which seem to me to be of major importance:

- The General Secretary's questions about CEC's organisation, functioning and habits raises the perspective of a fruitful work on its profile and future strategic orientations.
- The question of the overall dynamics of the strategic plan. At a time when CEC is ready to move into the operational phase to work towards the objectives, the health measures are forcing us to slow down.

II. Thematic report

This report will focus on the taking up office of the new General Secretary and on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. My activity in November and December being globally in the prolongation of the report made for the previous Governing Board, I will only mention what has been accomplished. I leave it up to you to discover them at the end of the agenda of the President listed under point III.

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A. Acting in absence of a General Secretary

The work regulations, adopted by the Governing Board in its November 2019 meeting, as required, have been transmitted to CEC employees and notified to the competent authorities for registration and thus enter into force.

Through a new IT consultant, we were able to retrieve the encrypted data. These data made it possible to restore accounting continuity.

From a staff perspective, after a year's work suspension for medical reasons, negotiations with Ms Charlotte Vander Borghet resulted in the termination of her employment contract.

Consulting our legal counsel to establish the employment contract of the new General Secretary has taken a significant amount of time.

B. Accompanying the new General Secretary in taking up his position

At the outset, I must say that Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen has invested his duties as General Secretary of CEC with method, thoroughness and commitment. As early as December he made himself available to meet with the Collegium and to take time to lay the foundations for a good and fruitful collaboration with me.



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Jørgen Skov Sørensen devoted time to meeting with staff and establish his position as manager. He invested himself in the closing of the 2019 accounts in order to be able to better control the CEC budget. He analysed the administrative and financial needs of our organisation and proceeded to hire a finance officer in agreement with the Presidency. Finally, he evaluated the perspectives in terms of communication and set up an operation modus operandi in line with the recommendations of the communication task force. After 5 months of presence, I am pleased to underline that his presence and his work have significantly contributed to stabilise the functioning of CEC's offices.

Communication between the President and the General Secretary is fluid and good. After a few attempts on how to proceed, we now have a regular videoconference appointment on Monday morning at 8:30 am and as many e-mails and calls as necessary during the week.

During the period of confinement, the General Secretary was very reactive, taking appropriate measures (teleworking, animation of staff, partial unemployment), ensuring a daily presence at the office.

Moreover, I am pleased to underline that Jørgen Skov Sørensen showed a great appetite to discover and understand CEC, its challenges, its organisation, its habits; and he did not fail to question them. From our discussions emerged a vision that I believe is relevant to the work on the future of the CEC, its profile, its capacity to strengthen Member Churches' ownership. By mutual agreement, particularly because of the energy mobilised to manage the lockdown but also because of its limitations, we decided that this questioning had no immediate urgency. We are planning a session on this subject at the November 2020 Governing Board.

I must also admit that during the health crisis in France, I was strongly mobilized by UEPAL, its President having been affected by the virus and unable to assume his functions for several weeks.

Let me also mention that if a certain sharing of roles between the Presidency and the General Secretary is already put in place, this should be formalised by the next Governing Board meeting. In conclusion, I would like to say that even if the General Secretary has not, in his capacity as General Secretary, taken up and managed urgent matters in the order of priority that I originally had in mind, he has dealt with all of them to date. I consider this to be a remarkable and successful entry into office.

C. The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic

Like all organisations, CEC has been deprived of the capacity to hold meetings. This has impacted the functioning of the team. The General Secretary will speak about this. But it has also impacted the working mechanisms of CEC and the general dynamic of CEC's work. Since the Novi Sad General Assembly (GA), the Governing Board has been working to establish a strategic plan, and on this basis has asked Member Churches for proposals to nominate Thematic Group members. At the very moment when these Thematic Groups were to hold their first meetings, Europe was confronted with the Covid-19 pandemic and the European countries took restrictive measures (prohibition of meetings, closure of borders).

Although the use of videoconferences allowed their work to start, a certain number of events, presentations or conferences had to be cancelled or postponed. In view of the next General



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Assembly scheduled according to the CEC constitution in 2023, the period 2020-2022 corresponds to the time when CEC has to produce its work in order to achieve its objectives. To keep it short, precisely at the time when work had to start, an external constraint complicates its realisation, slowing it down. What is more, probably the whole year 2020 will probably be marked significantly by restrictive measures complicating in particular the work of the international organisations and their capacity to achieve their objectives. Clearly, a problem of dynamics needs to be noted in the perspective of the next GA. Many international organisations are considering, or have already considered, postponing their General Assemblies. Would this be an option for CEC?

The proposal to prepare a public issue for the Governing Board on the Covid-19 pandemic was put forward by two members. The modalities of holding this session do not facilitate the elaboration and adoption of a public issue, in particular because of the concentration of work on two sessions organised during the same day. Aware of this difficulty, the Presidency wished to maintain for the principle of a call for a public issue. Concerning the Covid-19 pandemic and the health crisis it causes in Europe, CEC communicated three times.

A first time, on 2 April, CEC and COMECE urged European states in a press release to remain faithful to the common values of solidarity and unity, and not to "capitulate to fear and nationalism". The statement suggests many concrete ways to materialise cooperation, solidarity and unity among European countries that Christians are calling for. Stressing the revealing effect of this crisis, which exposes the vulnerabilities of our politics, our economy, our societies as well as those of our brothers and sisters, the communiqué gives thanks for all those who act in the service of the sick and the weakest and invites us to pray for them.

A second time, during Easter week, with an Easter message that is always issued jointly with COMECE, and again linked to the pandemic situation, we underlined that « *More than ever, current events remind us how much hope is a dimension of faith. "For in hope we were saved," affirms Apostle Paul in the epistle to the Romans, before continuing: "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."(Romans 8. 24-25).* »

Finally, the human rights Thematic Group has produced a reference text on the issue of the prohibition of celebrations in relation to the fundamental right of freedom of religion. This text states precisely that the prohibition of physical religious gatherings should not be confused with a prohibition of religious practice. At the next Human rights summer school, which will happen by videoconference, the work on this issue will continue with a more detailed analysis, particularly in view of its reception in various countries. Also other Thematic Groups have spent time dealing with churches' response to the pandemic. All documents are found on the CEC website.

Taking into consideration these elements, we found no real added value in producing a public issue for the Governing Board.



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III. President's agenda November 2019 – May 2020

1) Joint meeting CEC - CCEE (18-19 November 2019, Brussels)

On 18 November, CEC welcomed the Joint Committee of CEC and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE). Rev. Prof. Dietrich Werner made a presentation on understanding the rise of populism in Europe and churches' response. Rt Rev. Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, CEC Vice-President and Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto, General Secretary the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union gave response to this presentation. A statement will be elaborated for the next meeting (27 November 2020). The Joint Committee also discussed the implementation of the reception of Charta Ecumenica and decided to propose a liturgical proposal celebrating the Charta's vision and commitments (to be finalized for next meeting). for its 20th anniversary in 2021. Finally, the Joint Committee engaged into reflections about a next European Ecumenical Assembly. One option could be to organise such an assembly in 2026 (25th anniversary of Charta Ecumenica). To be continued.

2) Meeting EU President, David Sassoli (19 Novembre 2019, Brussels)

CEC President and COMECE President had a presentation visit with EU Parliament President David Sassoli. Content of the exchange: presentation of CEC, presentation of CEC's strategy plan with the three aims, situate CEC cooperation with COMECE, discussing our vision of the dialogue according to Art 17 TFEU (regular meeting with presidency, more focused on EU policy, concrete outcome). President Sassoli declared himself available for regular encounters. Concerning the project of a Conference on the future of Europe, of democracy and democratic participation in Europe, President Sassoli expected the Churches participation.

3) Meeting with President COMECE and Grand Rabbi Guigui (Vice president of the Conference of the European Rabbis) (19 November 2019, Brussels)

Grand Rabbi Guigui wished to share with the representatives of European Christian organisations his concern about the raise of antisemitism and also the growing secularity in European countries which tends to marginalise religions. He invites Christians and Jews to stand together and asked to work together on the voice religions have to raise in modern societies. We agreed to meet in June/July 2020 in Strasbourg to continue our reflections and to elaborate a methodology of working (possibly with other Christian and Jewish representatives).

4) Colloquium on evangelical churches organized by the French Protestant Federation (30 November 2019, Paris)

I gave a contribution "*L'altérité évangélique, approche institutionnelle d'un point de vue européen*" presenting Protestants in Europe and their contribution to the dialog in the frame of Art 17 TFEU.



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5) WCC Hosting Committee (3 December 2019, Karlsruhe)

The hosting committee is composed of representatives of Churches and church organisations cooperation in the hosting program of WCC's General assembly. After presentation of the planning committees and task forces, their work and an update of the preparation, the hosting committee had the opportunity to visit the selected places to welcome the Assembly. Considering that 2021 is foreseen to become an ecumenical year in Germany (WCC Assembly and ecumenical Kirchentag in Frankfurt) the idea was shared to have a celebration of the Charta Ecumenica 20th anniversary proposed by CEC in both events. Mid May 2020 I was informed of a possible postponement of WCC Assembly from September 2021 to 2022. A decision has now been made by the WCC Central Committee in June and the Assembly will be postponed to 2022.

6) Collegium (3-4 December 2019, Strasbourg)

CEC's office in Strasbourg traditionally welcomes the December collegium meeting. Dr. Jørgen Skov Sørensen was present at the meeting and introduced himself to the staff present.

7) Working meetings with Jørgen Skov Sørensen (2 + 5 December 2019, Strasbourg)

Taking advantage of the presence of Jørgen Skov Sørensen in Strasbourg, we used several working sessions to discuss our analysis of the varying CEC issues, address the priorities to be taken into consideration for the start in the position of General Secretary and clarify the bases of our collaboration.

8) International conference "Religion and liberalism" (12-13 December 2019, Moscow)

Responding to the invitation of the St. Andrew Biblical theological Institute (Moscow) I gave a keynote speech in an international conference on the theme "Religion and liberalism". Speakers from different confessional, cultural and theological backgrounds contributed to a detailed analysis of the relationship between religion and liberal culture. They also questioned the mechanisms of reform within religion.

9) Meeting with Archbishop Brauer, ELKSA, (14 December 2019, Moscow)

Being in Moscow, I took the opportunity to visit Archbishop Brauer from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia. In addition to the presentation of CEC and the strategic plan, my purpose was to discuss the strengthening of links with the Lutheran churches in Russia, Ukraine and Georgia. The Federation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Central Asia is thinking on becoming a federation of national churches, mostly because each church relates to a particular state and its law. The three European Churches (Russia, Ukraine, Georgia) are thinking of becoming direct member of CEC (also in LWF, WCC). We agreed to discuss this matter in the annual meeting of the council (15-17 May 2020) which was canceled.

10) Meeting Churches of the Rhine (17 December 2019, Strasbourg)

Historically, some members of the Churches of the Rhine (CERR) financially supported CEC and CERR common office in Strasbourg. In the last year, some Churches questioned the legal base of



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their commitment. The meeting discussed the issue and an agreement was reached in saying that the office is a common office for CEC and CERR, and that CERR will call upon its members to get their support to finance the common office. A commitment will be signed by each Church for 3 years, which will allow CERR to contribute more or less as in the past with an amount estimated 35 000-40 000 EUR.

11) Colloquium 50th anniversary of the Holy See's representation to European Council, (8 January 2020, Strasbourg)

I was invited to participate in the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Holy See's representation at the Council of Europe. I gave a lecture at a colloquium on the history and perspectives of this diplomatic representation on the theme "Ecumenical cooperation in Europe".

12) Croatian EU presidency (20 January 2020, Zagreb)

A common delegation composed of representatives from Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) and CEC met in Zagreb on Monday, 20 January 2020 with Mr. Andrej Plenković, Prime Minister of Croatia, to exchange on the priorities of the Croatian Presidency of the EU Council, which started on 1 January 2020.

The Prime Minister was accompanied by the Minister of Culture, the Minister of Justice, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the President and Vice-President of Parliament and two personal advisers. All had prepared the meeting well and worked on the remarkable document prepared by Marek Misak and Peter Pavlovic. We successively discussed participation of churches in the project of a Conference on the future of Europe of Europe, the situation of the Balkans with the potential extension of the EU to Albania and Northern Macedonia, the issue of migrants and refugees, etc.

13) Croatia church visits (19 January 2020, Zagreb)

The visit to Zagreb also offered an opportunity to visit representatives from CEC's member churches. We were welcomed by His Eminence Metropolitan Porfirije of the Diocese of Zagreb (Serbian orthodox Church), participated in a celebration in a Baptiste Church, met Toma Magda, President of Croatian Evangelical Alliance and Željko Mraz, General Secretary of the Baptist Union in Croatia. We also participated in the prayer for unity celebration hosted in the Cathedral on the invitation of His Eminence Cardinal Josip Bozanić, Archbishop of Zagreb, and in that context we were also able to exchange brief greetings with the bishops of the Lutheran Church of Croatia and Reformed Church.

14) Breakfast prayer in EU parliament (22 January 2020, Brussels)

On the occasion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, COMECE and CEC organised an ecumenical prayer breakfast at the European Parliament in Brussels with the kind support of MEP Peter van Dalen. Brother Aloïs from Taizé accepted to lead this prayer. A series of breakdowns (first the train, then my car) prevented my participation in this event. Peter Pavlovic read my greetings to the participants.



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15) Meeting with the Holy father (30 January 2020, Rome)

To honor CEC's 60th anniversary, and COMECE's 40th, Cardinal Hollerich arranged a private audience with Pope Francis. Our purpose was to present CEC's and COMECE's action and collaboration raising the churches voices toward the EU institutions, to the Holy Father in order get his support. Pope Francis was very interested in our work. During the exchange we discussed several European and global political issues (migration, climate change, populism, youth, ...).

16) Visit member churches in Rome (29 January 2020, Rome)

To strengthen CEC's link to his members, I visited the Protestant Federation in Italy as well as the Methodist Church in Italy. I took also the opportunity to visit Otto per mile, the organisation which regularly provides financial support to CEC's Human Rights Summer School.

17) Art 17 meeting (6 February 2020, Brussels)

We had planned a third Art 17 TFEU meeting bringing together the Brussels offices of CEC Member Churches at the European institutions. Due to illness and other setbacks, the format was unfortunately quite small. We had the opportunity to deepen our discussions with the General Secretary of CPCE. We also decided to draft a paper on the purpose of these meetings.

18) Presidency meeting (11 February 2020, Brussels)

19) The Business club "Cercle de l'III" (13 February 2020, Strasbourg)

In a meeting of 150 entrepreneurs of the tri-region (Germany, France, Switzerland), I was invited to develop how the churches analyse the present European situation and to discuss how essential trust is for the future of the European project.

20) General assembly of the Congregation of the Sœur de Pomeyrol (15 February 2020, Pomeyrol)

The sisters of Pomeyrol (South of France) asked me to present CEC's work and ecumenical cooperation in the frame of their general assembly.

21) Visit Church of Scotland (19-20 February 2020, Edinburg)

Being in Edinburg as co-chair of the Reully agreement contact group, I visited the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Scotland with CEC Governing Board Member Rev. Alison McDonald. We were welcomed by Rt Rev. John Armes, Bishop of Edinburg, who underlined the importance of CEC membership as a way of expressing European belonging. We also met the Ecumenical Officer of the Church of Scotland, Rev. Dr John McPake and Convener of the Ecumenical Relations Committee Rev. Sandy Horsburgh, as well as others involved in the work of CEC. The visit was a first since the Scottish Episcopal Church renewed its membership with CEC in 2017.



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22) Budget committee (21 February 2020, Brussels)

23) Meeting with Cardinal Hollerich, President COMECE (7 mars 2020, Luxemburg)

We discussed several issues of our cooperation: German presidency, EU policies, antisemitism, ongoing secularisation. On request of Grand Rabbi Guigui, we plan to organise a meeting on how to respond together to the two last issues.

24) Meetings cancelled to date

25-27 mars: 40th anniversary COMECE & Meeting with His Eminence Metropolitan Athenagoras, Grand Rabbi Guigui

28-29: March: Synod Protestant Church of the Netherland

3-4 May: General assembly Churches of the Rhine

15-17 May: Council of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia, Ukraine and Asia in Hrodna

22-24 May: Congress Union of French Baptist Churches in Paris