



Governing Board
Agenda Item: 6
Document Name: <b>rev 04/06/2020</b>
1GB2020_DOC6 GS REPORT TO GB
Purpose: To be received

Online, June 5 2020

## Report by the General Secretary

Below I report on key issues and challenges related to the management of CEC and I point to the initiatives that has been taken to address the immediate managerial needs I have uncouncted during my first five months of service. I finish by reflecting on a few long term issues that need attention in order to secure ownership from the Member Churches, secretariat coherence and better organisational visibility in wider society.

Before entering into my reporting to the Governing Board, however, I would like to take this opportunity to share my gratitude with the Governing Board members for the trust shown to me through my appointment as General Secretary of CEC. I take this as a sign of your confidence in my theological experience and managerial skills which I made the foundation for my presentation and interview in November last year.

I truly appreciate the organisational tasks lying ahead of us and trust that you as Governing Board and as individual members will support me in my efforts to implement the measures needed to reinvigorate and further develop CEC as a significant European Christian institution based on thorough theological reflection, an ecumenical spirit and commitment to serve European societies.

This said, it is noticeable that the majority of weeks and months since I took up office in January have been defined by the Covid-19 crisis and the subsequent lock-down. I had to cancel travel plans to Member Churches and after a few encouraging first weeks of encounters with key people in Brussels also physical meetings here had to be postponed to an unknown future slot.

This, however, released time and attention to the context and people of the secretariat. A presence – online for its major part - that has been worthwhile in the aftermath of a challenging 2019, even if the interim role of the CEC President from June to December was an important step towards stability in a difficult situation. My gratitude goes to Rev. Christian Krieger for preparing my entry and for his continued support and encouragement.

Please find at the very end of the report for your kind information a list of staff movements since last Governing Board Meeting.

### Activities

Due to the unusual framework and resulting time limitations of the current Governing Board meeting, gathered virtually via an on-line platform, there will be no oral reporting on the programmatic activities conducted by the executive secretaries.



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I invite Governing Board members to familiarise themselves with the individual reports submitted. Executive secretaries will be present at the meeting giving opportunity to ask questions deriving from the written reports.

## Covid-19

As an organisation which to a large extent rely on the encounter of people throughout Europe and beyond, CEC has obviously been hit by the Covid-19 crisis of 2020. As explained in my emails to the Governing Board March 12 and April 9, the CEC Secretariat in Brussels and Strasbourg took immediate precautionary measures, following the societal lock down in Belgium and France.

Throughout the pandemic period CEC staff has been working from home as it has been the government imposed norm in Belgium. France took initiative to a compulsory confinement which applied to staff based in Strasbourg. Travel and physical meetings were banned at an early stage. This is reflected in the activity reports. Tenants in the Ecumenical Centre in Brussels were requested to follow the Government instructions re. working from home.

Upon agreement with CCME General Secretary, Torsten Moritz, the General Secretary of CEC has been the only staff member working regularly from the secretariat, sorting ordinary mail and coordinating staff and tenants' occasional visits to the office. This in order to keep the number of staff present at a minimum at all times. Working from home is still the norm in Belgium and France at the time of writing.

The reports from the executive secretaries reflect how the crisis has affected planned activities, causing cancellations, postponements or on-line alternative. The reports in similar ways reflect initiatives derived from the crisis, esp. reflections from the Thematic Groups and statements from the President and General Secretary. See also the report from the CEC Communication Officer.

With a view to organisational cohesion during lock down and the subsequent lack of interaction in the Ecumenical Centre and in the office in Strasbourg, online measures have been implemented, including the opportunity for all to meet briefly and informally every day virtually at 9 am and a weekly mail update to all staff from the General Secretary. Also more frequent Collegiums are conducted.

Attention has from early on been directed towards the reopening of European societies and the European Institutions, identifying where CEC can play a role in the current situation. A number of initiatives are echoed in the activity reports. I would like to draw particular attention to the envisaged role of CEC and our Member Churches in the upcoming "[Conference on the Future of Europe](#)".



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## Finance

The secretariat succeeded in May 2020 to close the accounts 2019. The financial side of operations in 2019 suffered from changes in staff, lack of consistent hands-on overview, systematic follow up and unforeseen decisions of a critical nature. On this background, settling the accounts for 2019 was a long and painstaking affair, the complexity of which is reflected in the result.

The Treasurer will report separately on the matter during the current Governing Board meeting. Seen from the General Secretariat the decent result of 2019 must to a large extent be seen in the light of positions kept open and reductions in staff. It has, however, come with a cost in the shape of strains on the remaining staff, also causing some disruption in the day-to-day administration.

The experience of 2019 called for concern and action which has led to the assignment of a new Head of Finance, Administration and Payroll. Priorities are identified as a reworking of the CEC budget – both in terms of a simplified layout and contents – and not least the setting up of proficient procedures, safeguarding administrative stability and financial responsibility and transparency.

The Covid-19 crisis has caused concern for the future financial foundation for the work of CEC as Member Churches in ways similar to rest of society will be inflicted by the aftermath of the lockdown. The challenges were addressed with the Budget Committee. The Committee calls for continued monitoring of the situation in order to secure due diligence from the secretariat.

## Communication

Following the reduction of staff relating to communication of the organisation, implemented end of December 2019 for financial reasons, plans on how to work towards our immediate communication goals and obligations have been worked out between the General Secretary and the Communication Officer. A prioritized list of communication tasks has been set up with a view to the reduced staff framework.

The recent work of the CEC Communication Task Force will be part of a long-term sustainable solution. The effort of the Task Force has to some extent been afflicted by the European lockdown, however, the Task Force and relevant CEC staff discussed a draft note on a future communication strategy for the organisation. The draft is now in the hands of the secretariat.

A detailed report of action taken from the reworked Communication Desk is made available for the Governing Board members at the current meeting. The report is self-explanatory, but special attention is drawn to the fact that efforts are made to sharpen the various communications with the intention of highlighting core CEC activities, catering for the interests of Member Churches.



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## Ownership, Coherence and Visibility

Some of the following reflections have previously been shared and discussed with the Presidency. Shortly after taking office I read with interest the President's Report addressed to the Governing Board November 2019. The President's remarks on CEC calls for a strategic discussion.

On this background, I would like to highlight the following statements (my summaries).

- *CEC strategic plan: It is broad, covering a wide spectrum. Still, some MCs expect more from CEC.*
- *A broad-spectrum does not allow a clear image of what CEC stands for. CEC needs a clearer profile.*
- *Less staff but the same amount of work as before: This is not viable and "change management" is needed.*

I believe the three are fundamental to the work and nature of CEC: How do we prioritise within CEC? How do we focus the work of CEC? How do we reach the required changes in CEC?

From the Governing Board discussion on the report the following is minuted:

*In the discussion which followed, there was general agreement that resource constraints now and in the future made it necessary for CEC to sharpen its focus and be prepared to set priorities among the many activities which it might wish to undertake.*

*CEC should concentrate on areas of work where it was particularly well fitted to contribute and which other bodies were not so well equipped to deal with. Some felt that churches' interaction with the European political organisations (not only the EU) was central to CEC's role, although it was underlined that such intervention needed to be competent and focused.*

To move CEC forward on these issues and challenges, the Governing Board needs to address them again with a more long-term impact in mind. Reading through the recent history of the organisation (various documents, analyses and reports based on interviews) reveals that attempts have been made, but also that these attempts have not had the required effect.

Nobody should be blamed that the impact of previous attempts has remained absent as this kind of change management is one of the hardest organisational exercises to be conducted. On top of this, CEC is an organisation with a diverse and large constituency which increases the complexity of substantial changes. Add to this the tradition and history of CEC for further density of the matter.

In my view, the enhancement of "ownership, "coherence" and "visibility" within the organisation are paramount for CEC not only to survive but to thrive and develop. Ownership from the Member Churches, required to safeguard the legitimacy of CEC, coherence within the organisation, relating to the collective work and activity portfolio, and visibility within both churches and wider society.



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

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The three are symbiotic: Limited visibility equals limited ownership, adequate visibility demands better coherence, and coherence comes about only with ownership and derived responsibility from Member Churches. The fact is that all three require what the President mentions as *focus* and *priorities* which can only be defined if we know what is CEC's added value vis-à-vis its constituencies.

It is my firm belief that CEC's added value is our Christian heritage and theological foundation. Brussels and Strasbourg, host cities of the European Institutions, burst from organisations that aims to dialogue and gain influence on the future of Europe. CEC's added value in this sea of opinions and positions is "...Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles", fleshed out in focussed actions with maximum impact.

The current Governing Board meeting is due to its limitations not suited for an in depth dialogue of the issues at hand. Neither is the material made available at this stage of a nature that allows substantial decisions to be made. I hence appeal that the Governing Board in view of the initial discussion in November last year receives this report with a view to deeper analysis in November this year.

Jørgen Skov Sørensen  
General Secretary, CEC  
May 29, 2020



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## Staff movements

Below please find for your information a list of staff movements since the Government Board meeting, November 2019, in chronological order. I would like to draw the attention of the Government Board to the fact that Charlotte Vander Borght had served CEC as Finance and Administration Offices over a period of 24 years. May I suggest that this commitment to the life and work of the organisation is recognised by the Governing Board and reflected in the minutes of this meeting.

Daisy Bielo, Accountant Assistant	(out November 2019)
Dr Erin Green, Communication Coordinator	(out December 2019)
Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen, General Secretary	(in January 2020)
Lena Kumlin, Senior EU Policy Advisor	(in January 2020)
Charlotte (Charlie) Belot, Assistant	(out January 2020)
Charlotte Vander Borght, Finance and Administration Officer	(out January 2020)
Vanessa Barreto, Assistant	(in February 2020)
Georgios Maglis, Head of Finance, Administration and Payroll	(in May 2020)

# Human Rights Report

*Elizabeta Kitanovic*  
*Executive Secretary*

## UN

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1. CEC has a long-standing cooperation with the UN Office Human Rights Commissioner in Geneva. In 2017 UN Human Rights Commissioner launched the initiative Faith for Rights<sup>1</sup> cross-disciplinary reflection on links between religions and human rights. The secretariat of the UN Office Human Rights Commissioner has launched the Toolkit<sup>2</sup> on Faith for Rights which should encourage a work of faith-based organizations and leaders in the area of human rights. CEC has been invited to contribute to the process twice. Two CEC projects were taken as an example of the good practice in the toolkit – Standing up for Minority Rights (Serbo-Croatian visit to the EU institutions) p.40 and CEC Summer School on Human Rights p.65. Also, the case of the Archbishop Jovan from Ohrid (North Macedonia) that CEC has been monitoring and working on for a long time is featured on p. 28. The work of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden (RTCYPP)<sup>3</sup> where Church of Cyprus participate was also taken as a good practice example p.95.

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## EU

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### European Commission

2. CEC wrote a letter to the European Commission for the renewal of the post of the EU Special Envoy<sup>4</sup> for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside of the EU. President Ursula von der Leyen. responded to it. The EC doesn't foresee that the post is renewed at present.
3. European Commission has launched the first public consultation on Rule of Law<sup>5</sup> in the EU member states as one of the major initiatives of the EC Work program 2020. This report is to be a compilation of the significant positive and negative developments on

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/faith4rights-toolkit.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.religioustrack.com/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0449\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0449_EN.html)

<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law/rule-law-report\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law/rule-law-report_en)

the Rule of Law in the EU member states. CEC has submitted a response on the issues related to religious freedom and migration from the churches based on the EU member states. There is a plan that the report of this consultation is discussed in the national parliaments in autumn 2020. CEC continues to monitor the process. Spanish Evangelical Church started preparing the documentation on the issue of discrimination of Spanish pastors regard their pensions for the public debate in the Spanish National Parliament which is expected in autumn.

## European External Action Service (EEAS)

4. The European External Action Service has launched the consultation process on the EU program on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024.<sup>6</sup> CEC has been responding to EU consultation as a member of the Human Rights and Democracy Network.<sup>7</sup> In the document which represents the common response of the civil society, the issue of freedom of religion or belief and the rights of religious minorities found their place.

## EEAS and Council of Europe

5. "Wash your hands and defend human rights: EU and Council of Europe actions in the time of COVID-19".<sup>8</sup> COVID-19 has affected fundamental rights of the whole humanity in different scales. Council of Europe has raised the issues of exacerbation of domestic violence and the issues especially at care homes of elderly, populism, education of children, migrants, etc. CEC TG on HR produced the reflection paper<sup>9</sup> on COVID-19 and Religious Freedom which got lots of attention in the international media (church and secular media - Rai Due, EPD, Greek media, etc) and academic<sup>10</sup> and civil society networks.<sup>11</sup> The papers were discussed at the OSCE religious freedom expert group. It was translated into 11 languages<sup>12</sup> Bulgarian, Finnish, German, Greek, Hungarian, Portuguese, Romanian, Serbian, Spanish and Swedish, Russian + 3 coming (Italian, Armenian, Polish on the way).

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<sup>6</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/10101/2020/EN/JOIN-2020-5-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>

<sup>7</sup> <https://hrdn.eu/hrdn-statement-on-the-proposed-eu-action-plan-on-human-rights-and-democracy-for-2020-2024/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/guinea-bissau/77610/wash-your-hands-and-defend-human-rights-eu-and-council-europe-actions-time-covid-19\\_he](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/guinea-bissau/77610/wash-your-hands-and-defend-human-rights-eu-and-council-europe-actions-time-covid-19_he)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CEC-document-on-COVID-19-English-1.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://diresom.net/> and <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/events/the-covid-19-crisis-taking-stock-of-religious-responses>

<sup>11</sup> <https://hrdn.eu/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CEC-document-on-COVID-19-English-1.pdf>



## European Parliament (EP)

6. The EPP/ Interreligious and Intercultural dialogue group organized the meeting on the theme “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together” (Declaration<sup>13</sup> signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, February 2019). CEC Executive Secretary had several interventions during the dialogue on matters like rights of minorities v. common citizenship based on the CEC work on the rights of religious minorities in Europe. On that occasion, MEP Jan Olbrycht, co-chair of the EPP group on Interreligious and Intercultural dialogue said that he would like to deepen the discussion on the rights of religious minorities based on the CEC work and publications.

## OSCE

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7. “Addressing Intolerance, Discrimination, and Hate Crime: Responses of Civil Society and Christian and Other Religious Communities” was the expert meeting organized by the OSCE/ODIHR in Geneva which took place in 22–23 October 2019. The report from that event was recently released. CEC Executive Secretary for Human Rights brought to the OSCE attention the cases on violations of religious freedom coming from the CEC member churches and used the opportunity to present the CEC publication the Rights of Religious Minorities (read on p. 7).

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## Member churches and Partners

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8. Since the start of the COVID–19 pandemic, CEC has received information about particularly tense situations in Montenegro. Metropolitan Amfilohije and Bishop Joanikije of the Orthodox Metropolitan of Montenegro and Littoral were interrogated at the first stage at the police station as people voluntarily came to the churches. A few days later Bishop Joanikije and 8 priests were arrested on 12 of May.<sup>14</sup> CEC has informed the EEAS about current developments and continues to monitor the situation and supports the legal team.
9. Director for International Affairs of WCC Peter Prove has asked CEC for the assistance in planning 4 religious freedom ecumenical conversations during the next WCC Assembly.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-02/pope-francis-uae-declaration-with-al-azhar-grand-imam.html>

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.spc.rs/eng/his\\_grace\\_joanikije\\_we\\_request\\_religious\\_freedom\\_and\\_rule\\_law\\_and\\_order\\_state](http://www.spc.rs/eng/his_grace_joanikije_we_request_religious_freedom_and_rule_law_and_order_state)

## CEC projects:

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10. The 7th Summer School on Human Rights had to be replanned and re-shaped in the online form. The TG on HR is working on it trying to keep what is possible to be kept and agreed before COVID-19 pandemic, especially as it was planned to be held in Germany, during the EU German Presidency. CEC has been working on the video from the previous SSHR 2019, Hate Speech in the time of Raising Populism, Lisbon, Portugal. The working version is available on <https://youtu.be/RTc5opZv7x4> (still not to be distributed).
11. The CEC publication on the Protection of Holy Sites and Worship Places under National and International Law (the outcome of the Cyprus conference 2017) is to be finalized in the second part of 2020.
12. The process for the CEC publication on Human Rights and Populism has started.

# Strengthening and raising the voice of churches in Europe and the EU institutions

Lena Kumlin

Senior EU Policy Adviser

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland / Conference of European Churches

Since the beginning of this year, Lena Kumlin, Senior EU Policy Adviser in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF), has worked part-time for CEC. In accordance with the cooperation agreement **Strengthening the voice of Churches in Brussels** between CEC and ELCF, Kumlin was to spend two weeks monthly in Brussels, working 50 % for CEC during these weeks – thus allocating 25 % of her total working time for CEC-related tasks. These include i.a. monitoring EU policies and legislation of relevance for churches, enhancing the dialogue between the EU and churches according to Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty and strengthening the advocacy work and visibility of CEC - the overarching objective being **raising the voice of churches in Europe and the European institutions**, in line with key aim 3 of the CEC Strategy 2019 – 2023.

After an intense start, the COVID 19-pandemic profoundly changed the circumstances for performing the tasks mentioned in the agreement. After mid-March, travelling between Helsinki and Brussels has not been possible, and almost all meetings and events planned have been cancelled or postponed. The work on CEC-related tasks has continued in the form of remote working from Finland.

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## Monitoring EU policies and legislation of relevance for CEC and its Member Churches

With the new European Commission having been appointed only in the end of 2019 and due to the exceptional Coronavirus situation, most EU policies and legislative proposals have been or will be delayed.

The ambitious Working Programme of the European Commission for 2020 was launched on 29 January. The Programme - **'A Union that strives for more'** - has the ambition of being bold, forward-looking and putting people first. The aim is to lead the transition to a fair, climate-neutral, digital Europe, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. One aim is also to review all previous initiatives and to work for better EU regulation and legislation. All the six headline ambitions of the Commission Working Programme: *A European Green Deal*, *A Europe fit for the digital age*, *An economy that works for people*, *A stronger Europe in the world*, *Promoting our European Way of Life* and *A new push for European democracy*, are of significance also for the work of CEC. As soon as the situation gets back to normal, relevant policies and legislative proposals are to be actively monitored and advocacy work pursued within CEC, in close collaboration with other relevant partners.

The upcoming **Conference on the Future of Europe**, which was to be launched on Europe Day 9 May 2020 in Zagreb, but has now been postponed to at least September, has been monitored

and plans on how to engage both CEC and its Member Churches throughout the process initiated. A draft Briefing Paper re. the Conference is attached to this report.

The CEC Governing Board has decided to set up a CEC Working Group on EU Policy and Legislation in order to monitor EU policies and legislation of relevance for CEC Member Churches. The aim is to convene the group in the autumn 2020, when the legislative work of the EU is likely to be resumed.

## **Developing and enhancing the dialogue between the EU and Churches according to Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty (TFEU)**

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Article 17 of TFEU creates an opportunity for open, transparent and regular dialogue between the European Union and churches. In line with the CEC Strategy, CEC is to engage in this dialogue and closely monitor developments in European institutions, inviting its members to engage and act.

The work relating to creating and developing contacts with key partners in both the new European Commission, the new European Parliament and other relevant organizations and bodies is still in progress. At the moment, all Article 17 meetings have been postponed due to the Coronavirus situation. The work will be resumed immediately when the situation gets back to normal.

The preparations for the upcoming German EU Presidency have started in close collaboration with COMECE and the EKD Brussels Office. The plans include a joint written CEC-COMECE contribution to the German Presidency Programme, a meeting with the German EU Ambassador in Brussels in July and a meeting with the German EU State Secretary in Berlin in October.

CEC invited a group of partners in Brussels on 6 February to discuss how to develop and enhance the Article 17 dialogue. The work will continue in the autumn. The work on updating the joint CEC-COMECE general considerations on the implementation of the dialogue foreseen by Article 17(3), published in 2010, has also been initiated. The aim is to present visions and suggestions on how to develop and strengthen the dialogue between the EU and churches.

## **Planning, coordinating and assisting in implementing CEC advocacy strategies**

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Plans have been made in order to develop CEC advocacy strategies, with the aim being a well-focused, defined, effective and strategic advocacy work on European level, based on coherence, cooperation and transparency, with clearly identified strategic priorities. This work is to be continued in close collaboration with the CEC staff, with special focus on communication and involvement of CEC Member Churches.

## **Arranging a 'Europe of Values' discussion forum at the European level**

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The plan was to arrange an *Europe of Values*- discussion forum at the European level in mid-June, inviting Brussels-based EU experts representing various sectors – such as EU Institutions, regional offices, the business sector, trade unions, science, education and culture and NGOs – from different Member States, in order to reflect and discuss about common European values

in an open and confidential atmosphere. The meeting would be facilitated by ELCF, drawing on the experience of the ELCF Europe of Values-concept. The event has been postponed due to the Coronavirus situation.

### **Increasing the visibility of CEC and preparing for the latter half of 2020**

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The visibility of CEC can best be enhanced by proactive, high-quality advocacy work and by strengthening partnerships and networks. One concrete initiative is to organize discussion events in the CEC premises, bringing together people from the EU institutions, NGOs and other cooperation partners to reflect on and discuss topical issues such as the European Green Deal, digitalization and AI from an ethical perspective, social Europe and the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe. Due to the Coronavirus situation, these plans have currently been postponed.

However, it is essential to 'keep the engine going' and continue preparations in order to be able to act swiftly and take up advocacy work immediately when the situation gets back to normal. This includes maintaining and further developing contacts and networks in a situation where it is extremely difficult to establish new professional contacts.

ELCF and the President and General Secretary of CEC have proposed to continue the CEC-ELCF cooperation agreement until the end of this year, in order to be able to develop and continue the work, projects and tasks that were started in the beginning of the year but that have been at least partially interrupted or postponed due to the COVID 19-situation. The first months of the project have shown that the cooperation project does create win-win situations and synergy benefits for both parties, thus boosting efficiency in working with European Affairs. The overarching aim remains strengthening the voice of both CEC and its Member Churches at the European level.

## DRAFT Briefing Paper to CEC Member Churches

*Due to the current Corona situation, the launch of the Conference on the future of Europe – which was supposed to take place on Europe Day, 9 May, in Zagreb, has been postponed until at least September 2020. Thus, the best timing for issuing a factsheet/Briefing Paper to CEC Member -Churches would be in August 2020. Below, a first draft outline for such a Briefing Paper.*

*“From the very beginning, I made clear that people need to be at the very centre of all our policies. My wish is therefore that all Europeans will actively contribute to the Conference on the Future of Europe and play a leading role in setting the European Union’s priorities. It is only together that we can build our Union of tomorrow.”*

*Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission*

# **THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE**

## **What is it all about – and how can churches be involved?**

### **Background**

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In her political guidelines for the European Commission 2019-2024, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen proposed to set up **a Conference on the Future of Europe**, in order to involve European citizens in the discussion about the future of the European project.

**The aim** of the Conference is to on a broad basis – involving both EU-institutions, national parliaments, civil society and European citizens – discuss how to develop the European project and form a more efficient and democratic European Union, both concerning institutional dynamics and EU policies. On the national level, both national governments and national parliaments need to be involved, together with regional and local authorities. Also EU candidate countries should be able to participate in the Conference. The civil society also has an important role to play throughout the process. Here, there is indeed an important role to play also for churches and religious communities as well as faith-based organizations.

The term ‘Conference’ is a bit misleading, as it is actually a two-year process, initially intended to start in May/June 2020.

### **The positions of the European institutions**

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The idea of a Conference on the future of Europe was originally launched by French President Emmanuel Macron in March 2019. A French-German non-paper drafted in November 2019 (<https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Conference-on-the-Future-of-Europe.pdf>)

outlined the main structure and issues of the Conference. The project was discussed and endorsed by the European Council Summit in December 2019

(<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/41768/12-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf>).

**The European Parliament** adopted on 15 January 2020 a resolution on the set-up and scope of the Conference on the Future for Europe ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0010\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0010_EN.pdf)).

**The European Commission** published a Communication to the European Parliament and the Council shaping the Conference on the Future of Europe on 22 January 2020

([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-conference-future-of-europe-january-2020\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-conference-future-of-europe-january-2020_en.pdf)).

**The General Affairs Council** discussed the issue on 28 January

(<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/42345/st05573-en20.pdf>). The Council has, under the Croatian Presidency, exchanged views, affirming that the Conference should develop EU policies in the medium and longer term to better address the challenges facing Europe.

**A joint inter-institutional declaration** on the Conference of the Future of Europe, defining the concept, structure and scope and the principles and objectives of the Conference, is still to be elaborated. Currently, the EU institutions have distinctively different views regarding for example concerning how to involve EU citizens in the process (the European Parliament proposes Citizens' Agoras and a Youth Agora, whereas the Commission would prefer building on the experiences of previous Citizens' dialogues) and whether the Conference might lead to institutional reforms, i.e. treaty changes.

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## **What is the Conference about and how will it be structured?**

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**The topics** for the Conference agenda are still unclear. The following issues have initially been proposed as key topics for the Conference:

- Promoting human rights, enhancing democracy and the rule of law in the EU
- Combating climate change
- Promoting social justice and equality
- The Spitzenkandidaten system and transnational lists for European Parliament elections
- Migration – not as a threat but as a challenge
- The enlargement process
- Deepening of the EMU

One important question is **involvement of EU citizens** and how the content of citizens' consultations shall be taken into consideration. The consultations need to be organized in an open, transparent, well-structured and inclusive manner, involving especially young people. The concerns and expectations of EU citizens must be taken into account by the decision-makers and developed into tools for efficient policymaking in order for the Conference to

become a meaningful exercise. The follow-up is indeed very important in order to gain and preserve the trust of EU citizens.

However, there are still many open questions re. the concept, scope, governance, structure and timing of the Conference.

## **The Conference postponed**

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The Conference was initially to be launched on Europe Day, 9 May 2020, in Zagreb and to run for two years. Due to the Coronavirus situation, the Conference will now be postponed to at least September 2020.

The COVID-19 crisis is also redefining the agenda and main priorities of the Conference on the Future of Europe. EU's response to the COVID-19 crisis and healthcare is likely to be on the agenda instead of the topics initially proposed, such as the Spitzenkandidaten system. A call for treaty change might also be put on the table, especially concerning EU competence on the health sector. Reflection on common core values of the EU, such as solidarity, is also likely to be high on the agenda of the Conference.

## **Why is the Conference on the Future of Europe important for churches?**

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There are currently many open questions concerning the scope, structure, governance and mandate of the Conference. There certainly needs to be more clarity to all these, including a clear vision regarding the added value, outcome and the direction of the Conference in order to engage both Member States and EU citizens.

However, it is maybe now more important than ever to have a structured, overarching discussion about values and solidarity in Europe and about what kind of European Union we want.

Churches are a credible dialogue partner for the EU and represent – through their members millions of citizens throughout Europe. Churches are also deeply rooted in all EU Member States – from European and national to the local and regional level and can act as bridge-builders and restoring trust between countries, regions and people throughout Europe – especially in these challenging times.

Churches have an important message and value to add to the discussion about the future of Europe, especially regarding values. Thus, the voice of churches needs to be heard and churches actively involved in the Conference on the Future of Europe.

## **How can CEC and its Member Churches be involved?**

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CEC should be strongly involved in the process, building on the experiences of the *What Future for Europe? Reaffirming the European project as building a community of values* - project, including regional consultations on the future of Europe (<https://www.ceceurope.org/what-we->



[do/open-letter/, http://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/1GB2016\\_Doc15-Open-letter-Future-of-Europe.pdf](http://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/1GB2016_Doc15-Open-letter-Future-of-Europe.pdf)).

From a CEC perspective, it is essential to recommit to our common European values and to engage and get actively involved in the discussions about the future of Europe on both European and national level – in close collaboration with both COMECE and other Article 17 dialogue partners as well as other FBOs and CSOs and CEC Member Churches.

CEC needs to, throughout the process, keep its Member Churches informed about the Conference on the Future of Europe, inspire them to get involved at national and local level and share good examples and best practices.

CEC can also be proactive by arranging or facilitating various thematic discussion events, seminar, webinars and online discussions both in Brussels and in the Member States, in close cooperation with Member Churches.

## Conclusion

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The main aim of the Conference on the Future of Europe is a more efficient and democratic European Union, listening to the concerns and expectations of the EU citizens. The Conference is of importance also for churches, and CEC and its Member Churches needs to be actively involved, adding value and bringing a Christian perspective to the process.

The Conference on the Future of Europe needs to be open, transparent and inclusive, truly listening to the concerns and views of EU citizens of what kind of Europe we want – for both current and future generations.

*Lena Kumlin*  
*Senior EU Policy Advisor ELCF/CEC*  
*29.4.2020*

# Report Strasbourg office January – June 2020

*Sören Lenz*  
*Executive Secretary*

The CEC office in Strasbourg is a common office of the Conference of Churches on the Rhine and the Conference of European Churches founded in 1980. The office is run by an Executive secretary traditionally seconded by the UEPAL (*Union des Églises Protestantes d'Alsace et de Lorraine*), who has a partial service assignment for the Conference of Churches on the Rhine (40%). An administrative assistant (75%) assists the executive secretary in his work.

The focus of the Strasbourg office is the work with the Council of Europe and the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

## 1. CEC's participation in European Institutions

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### **Council of Europe**

CEC has a participatory status with the Council of Europe and is therefore invited as an observer in the steering committees Bioethics and Education. This includes the possibility to participate in the substantive discourse on questions concerning Christian ethics and Church interests. The Strasbourg office also regularly participates in the common prayer breakfast of the Parliamentary Assembly.

### **Bioethics**

Over the next years, the Steering Committee of Bioethics, in which CEC participates, will focus especially on issues of new Technologies in Biomedicine. It goes without saying that ethics based on Christian anthropology must attentively follow technical developments with their own dynamics in the field of biomedicine and, if necessary, participate constructively in the ethical discussion. In this context, the areas of artificial intelligence and genome editing are particularly noteworthy.<sup>1</sup>

### **Education policies**

An extraordinary video conference of the Steering Committee of Education policy and practice had to substitute the planned Session in Strasbourg in April 2020. A unique issue was the Covid-19 crisis sharing of information and good practices. CEC participated

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<sup>1</sup> You find the abridged report of November Session of the Steering Committee here:  
<https://rm.coe.int/16th-dh-bio-abridged-report-f/1680990d79>

in this meeting and contributed with the reflections of the TG Education, democracy and diversity, which are published on the Council of Europe website.<sup>2</sup>

### **Conference of Christian NGOs with the council of Europe (CINGO)**

The Conference of Christian NGOs monitors an additional project of a White book on European Cultural Identity with the Education committee of the Conference of International NGOs. The first meetings concerning the expertise and a potential contribution from CEC has taken place in the beginning of this year.

### **European Parliament**

The Strasbourg office presented the work of CEC and the challenges for the future at the EPP Group's Working Group on Intercultural Relations and Interreligious Dialogue on February 11<sup>th</sup>. The dialogues between this EPP group and CEC is a longstanding tradition and an outstanding opportunity for CEC to share the interest of the Member Churches with MEPs.

Rev. Sören Lenz, the person responsible of the Strasbourg office regularly participates in the Prayer Breakfast during the Plenaries in Strasbourg.

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## 2. CEC - Thematic groups- Education, Democracy and Diversity (TG EDU) and TG Science, New Technologies and Christian Ethics (TG SCI)

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The following Thematic Groups have been traditionally linked to the work of CEC with the Council of Europe and its focus on Bioethics and Education issues (see above)

### **TG Education, Democracy and Diversity**

Because of the Covid-19 crisis, the scheduled first meeting of the newly established Thematic Group has been replaced by video conferences. The Covid-19 crisis posed great challenges to the field of education and democracy. Three essential topics regarding the crisis were identified by the working group and presented in a paper (see above)<sup>3</sup>

Based on the *Charta Oecumenica*, the paper stresses the need to work together as Churches in this time of crisis and to reject together any form of exclusion and nationalism. In addition, it draws attention to the social challenges for education in which churches in many countries are involved. This concerns especially discrimination of children from socially disadvantaged families when access to new communication technologies is difficult or for whom school is an important socialisation factor. The Thematic Group concludes that Christian hope unites Churches and encourages sharing

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/how-do-schools-and-universities-cope>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/TG-EDU-reflections-Covid19\\_Final.pdf](http://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/TG-EDU-reflections-Covid19_Final.pdf); the same paper is also published on the website of the Council of Europe, see footnote 2.

and contributing to a just world through different Christian traditions, the experience of democracy and appreciation of the value of human rights.

Following the decision of the GB in November 2019, the TG will continue the work on “populism” and its impact on education, democracy and human rights. There will be a tight cooperation with the TG Human Rights to identify the common points, the future challenges for Member Churches and the use of the diverse expertise of both groups.

### **TG Science, New Technologies and Christian Ethics**

During the Covid-19 crisis, scheduled physical meetings were replaced by virtual conferences in which the TG elected Dr. Julija Vidovic from the Serbian Orthodox church as chair. The first discussion just before Easter concerned the celebration of Easter services in the different traditions. Due to the prohibition of assembly in many countries, modern means of communication were extensively used, especially for various forms of worship services. The paper developed by the group deals with the topic and tries to convey some thoughts on this to the Member Churches, taking into account different Christian traditions.<sup>4</sup> The group is currently working on a comment to the White paper of Artificial Intelligence as proposed by the European Commission.<sup>5</sup> The comment from the TG will focus on three thematic issues such as discrimination and freedom of belief, human dignity and anthropological issues, social impact of artificial intelligence and ecological issues.

Furthermore, the group decided for the future work to preserve the continuity of the work already done within the Thematic Reference Group and produce relevant work that will correspond to the name of the group under which the members are gathered and mandated by their respective Churches today: Science, Technology and Christian Ethics. Thus, the TG proposes to continue the work focusing on two themes: a) artificial intelligence and b) genome editing/human enhancement.

According to the Strategic Plan, special attention will be paid to other topics where artificial intelligence plays an essential role. A new strategic action plan of the TG will bring different ethical and theological approaches into the discussion to enable Member Churches to develop a theological and critical understanding.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Reflections-Virtual-worshipping-final-version.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/white-paper-artificial-intelligence-european-approach-excellence-and-trust>

### 3. Other contacts and partners of the Strasbourg office

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#### **Conference of Churches on the Rhine**

Several Churches along the Rhine financially support the Strasbourg office. Discussions are currently underway within the Conference of Churches on the Rhine to ensure financial support for the CEC office in Strasbourg in the near future.

#### **Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the Council of Europe<sup>6</sup>**

The Strasbourg office has made contact with the recently appointed Permanent Representative of the Holy See, Marco Ganci, and both agreed to continue working closely together. A joint approach between CEC and the permanent observer regarding a future dialogue platform for religious communities and the Council of Europe should be coordinated in the future.<sup>7</sup>

#### **WCC General Assembly 2021 in Karlsruhe and *Ökumenischer Kirchentag in Frankfurt 2012***

The Strasbourg office is as well involved in the regional planning team for the WCC General Assembly 2021 in Karlsruhe and coordinator for CEC Collegium for the *Ökumenische Kirchentag 2021 in Frankfurt*. The first video conferences concerning these events took place in the spring.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permanent\\_Observer\\_of\\_the\\_Holy\\_See\\_to\\_the\\_Council\\_of\\_Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permanent_Observer_of_the_Holy_See_to_the_Council_of_Europe)

<sup>7</sup> More about the platform on the Website of the Council of Europe. See especially the reply of the Committee of Ministers' Deputies to the PACE from the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2016. <https://rm.coe.int/09000016806427f2>

# Activity report

*Peter Pavlovic*  
*Study Secretary*

## EU Presidencies

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Joint effort of CEC and COMECE to approach the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU (first half of 2020) was marked by activities taking place already before the Presidency started. In December 2019 was finalised a CEC-COMECE document identifying joint churches' concerns related to priorities of Croatian Presidency and CEC-COMECE delegation held a productive conversation with the Head of Croatian Permanent Representation in Brussels, Ambassador Andrassy. Addressing the Croatian Presidency was accompanied by efforts to use this opportunity for re-vitalising contacts with CEC member churches in Croatia and include them into the procedure. Relevance of such an approach was supported by the fact that none of 5 protestant member churches in Croatia participated in the CEC Assembly in Novi Sad in 2018, in spite of the venue of the Assembly was in the same region and in very close distance to these churches.

The CEC-COMECE delegation led by CEC and COMECE Presidents and with participation of representatives of local churches from Croatia met with the Prime Minister of Croatia Andrej Plenkovic on 20 January 2020. The exceptionally strong delegation of Croatian Presidency included along the Prime Minister, the Minister of Interior, Minister of Culture, the State Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Vice-Speaker of the Parliament and the President of the Academy of Sciences.

The discussion focused, particularly, on the theme of Future of Europe and the upcoming conference to this theme initiated by the EU, whereby CEC and COMECE expressed their willingness to actively contribute to the conference. Other themes discussed included in particular: churches' support for fostering the integration of countries of South-East Europe into the European Union, concerns related to existing divisions in Europe and concerns related to migration and refugee policies.

CEC visit in Zagreb was used for visiting and an intensive dialogue with CEC member churches in Croatia, as well as for an exchange with bishops representing Croatian bishop's conference, which was extensively reported in Croatian media. The programme of the visit included participation in the well-attended ecumenical worship service in cathedral of Zagreb at the occasion of the Week of Prayers for Christian Unity and inputs of both Presidents to the worship service, and the joint CEC-COMECE visit of the nuncio.

## **Ecumenical prayer at the occasion of the Week of Prayers for Christian unity in the European Parliament**

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On the occasion of the Week of Prayers for Christian Unity the CEC held together with the COMECE on 22 January 2020 for the first time a joint ecumenical prayer at the European Parliament.

Addressing political and Church representatives, the Presidents of CEC and COMECE highlighted the importance of unity in challenging times. They prayed together to overcome divisions and foster reconciliation across Europe. The event was attended by several MEPs included the First Vice-President of the European Parliament Mairead McGuinness and representatives of churches and church related organisations in Brussels.

## **EP Dialogue seminar – European Green Deal**

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The first Dialogue seminar in the frame of the Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) hosted by the newly elected European Parliament took place on 28 January 2020. The seminar was organised under the auspices of Mairead McGuinness, Vice-President of the EP responsible for the implementation of the Article 17 and in the presence of Margaritis Schinas, newly appointed member of the European Commission responsible for the dialogue with churches and faith communities.

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The theme of the seminar was “European Green Deal: Preserving our Common Home.” CEC contributed to the programme of the seminar through a presentation by the Study Secretary. Other speakers at the seminar included a representative of Orthodox Churches, the Holy See, Evangelical Churches, as well as representatives of Jewish, Muslim and Hindu communities and a representative of humanists.

CEC contribution to the seminar underlined that churches’ commitment to values of responsibility and justice is not limited to theological studies, ethical considerations and prayers, but is at the same time underpinned by numerous activities of churches in many countries across the continent, such as motivating and engaging communities, networking, sharing of good practices and concrete works on reduction of ecological footprint, as well as through support of many churches across the continent for an ambitious European Green Deal. In churches’ understanding, ecological and social concerns must not be separated. Considerations about radical transformation, which is at the core of the Green Deal, must include social impacts of such measures, ethical and human aspects need to get proper attention.

## **Meeting of the CEC thematic group Economic and ecological justice and sustainable future**

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The group met for the first time on 26-27 February 2020. The group enjoys a good mix of members from different confessional backgrounds, incl. one member of Roman Catholic Church (nominated by Ecumenical Council of Churches in Finland), stimulating combination of experienced and new members, as well as presence of members from variety of European regions.

Considerable time was given to clarification of the task and mandate of the group, as well as to outlining of the context for the group activities provided by CEC strategic plan. Group elected as its moderator Kees Nieuwerth from the Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Netherlands.

To the programme of the session belonged sharing of experience and information about churches' activities related to the theme of the group, as well as an input of an external speaker from the European Commission DG climate informing the group about activities of the European Commission related to the ambitious programme of the European Green Deal.

For the next period the group decided to work on three parallel tracks:

A/ Reacting to the European Green Deal and identifying major concerns and critical points of the strategy from the perspective of churches.

B/ Environmental theology, while focusing especially on the question: Why churches need to speak on care for creation and a sustainable future? The group launched an effort to collect information about relevant publications on green theology and an effort to assemble a collection of relevant theological materials.

C/ Sharing examples of good practices in churches in Europe, and collecting material for a case study focusing in particular on: ethical finance, energy and churches' response to carbon emergency strategies and carbon reduction targets.

The next meeting of the group is scheduled for 7-8 October 2020.

## **Preparation for COP 26, a joint CEC-WCC visit in Glasgow**

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A joint CEC-WCC visit in Glasgow in preparation for next annual climate meeting COP 26 (planned for November 2020) took place from 4-6 February 2020. The context of the visit has been given by widely acknowledged role of the WCC in annual COP meetings and an active role of CEC in this process. Particular emphasis on the role of CEC and European churches is given especially in those occasions when COP meetings take place in Europe, as it was for example in Katowice 2018.



Members of the joint team were: Henrik Grape (World Council of Churches), Peter Pavlovic (Conference of European Churches), Steve Hucklesby (Joint Public Issues Team), Adrian Shaw (Church of Scotland).

The purpose of the visit was to establish contacts with local church and faith-based groups in Glasgow and to meet with representatives of Scottish government, as well as representatives of the city council in order:

- to share experiences and lessons from previous COPs that may be helpful in organising local activities
- to listen to local initiatives and their aspirations related to COP
- make local initiatives and local authorities aware of international and ecumenical churches' efforts and their contributions to the COP process
- to make preparations for a visible and effective presence of churches during COP26.

The ecumenical team met with members of the Glasgow Churches COP26 Co-ordinating Committee, Faith based development agencies active in Scotland (Christian Aid, SCIAF, Tearfund, Islamic Relief), Rev Mark Johnstone (Minister St. Mungo's Cathedral), representatives from Interfaith Scotland and Interfaith Glasgow, Ms. Tessa Ferry, a representative of Scottish Government, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland international group and with Councillor Stephen Curran and Duncan Booker from Glasgow City Council.

Ecumenical team appreciated already achieved progress in the planning for churches presence in COP26 from the side of local church and faith-based partners and enthusiasm we encountered. There are challenges of coordination within Scotland, the UK and internationally, but with good networking these can be overcome.

The meetings helped to create an agenda for action by faith groups which all partners are invited to discuss, develop and share with others.

Unfortunately, recent outbreaks of Covid-19 pandemic led to postponement of COP26. Churches' preparation for COP26 will restart as soon as the development in pandemic will allow it and the new date for COP26 will be announced.

# Thematic area Ecclesiology & Mission

*Katerina Pekridou*  
*Executive Secretary*

## **1. Thematic Group on Ecclesiology & Mission**

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The first meeting of the TG on Ecclesiology & Mission was held online on 22 April 2020. Due to the urgency of the situation with regard to Covid-19, the first part of the meeting focused on sharing on churches' responses to the pandemic. The rest of the meeting discussed CEC's Strategy Plan and programmatic goals. The group decided to form subgroups that are going to develop the new projects. During the first meeting the TG formed subgroups to work on:

- a. a study on baptism
- b. a theological reflection series, which will feature on CEC's website, and
- c. project concerning the mapping of bilateral and regional ecumenical dialogues (CEC Strategy Plan 2019-2023, Aim 2).

The second meeting of the TG was held online on 12 May 2020. Members continued to reflect on CEC's programmatic goals and orientation of the TG, especially the ways ecclesiology and mission connect. Additional subgroups were formed to focus on a number of projects:

- d. The Hope of Communion: International Conference on Church Unity. The Conference, which was initially scheduled to take place in Istanbul in 2020, is going to commemorate the Patriarchal Encyclical of 1920 on Church Unity and the Lambeth Appeal to All Christian People published the same year. Upon consultation with CEC Vice-President Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden and All Scandinavia, a new date will be sought to hold the Conference in 2021.
- e. Evangelisation. The TG discussed how evangelisation is concerned with the verbal witness to gospel with intention of conversion or deepening of faith commitment, and the different variations of practice as well as the urgency of evangelisation on grass root level. It decided to initiate a project that will provide ecumenical investigation and missiological reflection on motivations (soteriological, eschatological, anthropological, pneumatological), goal (prosperity, membership, salvation), and practice of evangelisation of grass root level in contemporary Church. These projects correspond to CEC Strategy Plan 2019-2023, Aim 2.

f. Public theology. In conversations among staff concerning the Conference on the Future of Europe launched by the European Institutions, the need was discerned to articulate a CEC position on public theology. The TG gladly took up the task of reflecting on it and a subgroup is already working on the topic.

The subgroups are meeting separately online until the third TG meeting which is going to be held on 15 June 2020.

## **2. Assembly Planning Committee meeting – World Council of Churches**

The third meeting of the assembly planning committee (APC) convened in Karlsruhe, Germany, 2-9 December 2019, at the invitation of the EKD, the Evangelische Landeskirche in Baden (Evangelical Church in Baden), and the host committee. The meeting was held in the same location as the 11th Assembly, so that the APC could experience the venue and meet with the local host committee. The APC was greeted by the Lord Mayor of Karlsruhe and was later hosted at a reception at the Town Hall. CEC executive secretary for theological dialogue participated in the meeting. In a joint session with the host committee, the APC reflected on the hopes for the assembly, and discussed the desired outcomes. CEC President Rev Christian Krieger, participated in the joint meeting in his capacity as member of the host committee. Please see attached report for details and a draft schedule of the WCC Assembly.

## **3. European Regional Pre-Assembly**

The planning group for the European Regional Pre-Assembly met online for the first time on 19 March 2020. Significant consideration was given to the content of the Pre-Assembly and members of the group noted the importance of theological reflection in a large event such as the Pre-Assembly. They underlined the themes of reconciliation and rising populism, as well as the urgency environmental questions. The second meeting of the planning group took place on 26 May 2020. This project corresponds to the goal of strengthening partnerships with ecumenical partners, and especially with WCC (CEC Strategy Plan 2019-2023, Aim 2).

## **4. Cooperation with CCME**

CEC worked with CCME in developing the content and programme of the Conference 'Uniting in Diversity – Migration changing churches in Europe,' which was going to be held in April 2020 at the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Leuven, Belgium. The Conference, which is postponed for October 2020, is focusing on 'migrant-led' churches and will address questions of ecclesiology and inclusion. CEC cooperates with CCME also in the 'Mapping Migration' project. Cooperation with CCME on questions relating to 'migrant' churches is crucial, as it is mutually enriching and connect our respective networks (CEC Strategy Plan 2019-2023, Aim 2).

## **5. Cooperation with the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS)**

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CEC participates in the planning of the Europe Conference of IAMS which is going to take place from 5-10 September 2022 in Cluj, Romania. The tentative theme of the Conference is 'Missions towards human dignity: Challenges from the Black Sea region.' The intention of the organising committee is to invite participants through issues relevant to the region, especially the issues that appeal to mission studies scholars/missiologists from all over Europe in such a way that they enthusiastically respond to the call. While acknowledging that the notion of Black Sea, as any regional notion, is a socio-political construction, the organising committee is also considering the following countries as belonging to the region: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Hellenic Republic, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine. For CEC this is an important network to be acquainted with as it brings together missiologists and mission practitioners from regions that are not often present in our theological reflections. The first planning meeting took place on 6 April 2020.

## **6. Cooperation with the Global Forum of Theological Educators (GFTE)**

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CEC participates in the planning of the third meeting of the Global Forum of Theological Educators that will take place at the Yoido Full Gospel Church's Youngsan Camp, Seoul, from 13-18 June 2021. The planning group met online for a first meeting on 28 January 2020 and discussed formation and human development as a possible theme for the meeting. Human growth and maturity for leadership were also discussed in relation to the experience and profile of the theological educator. Exchange of ideas and planning continue online.

## **7. European People's Party (EPP) breakfast on the occasion of "World Day of Human Fraternity"**

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The Co-Chairmen of the EPP Working Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue Mr Jan Olbrycht MEP and Mr György Hölvényi MEP held a breakfast meeting on the occasion of the 1st anniversary of the signature of the Declaration by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The meeting took place on 4 February 2020 at the European Parliament and focused on how the declaration can be made known and taken up on European and national levels.

## **8. PRO ORIENTE Steering Committee for Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue (POSCOCD)**

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The meeting of the subgroup of the POSCOCD 'Connecting Dialogues' was held online on 27 May 2020. The project of the subgroup is funded by PRO ORIENTE and focuses on creating a collection of documents and material related to Orthodox-Catholic dialogues. The outcomes of this project will be connected to the CEC project on mapping bilateral and regional dialogues.

# CEC Communication Activity Report (January – June 2020)

*Naveen Qayyum*  
*Communication Officer*

## Context

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Despite major changes at the CEC Communication desk in January, communication projects continued to be implemented, promoting CEC Strategy 2019-2023: "Together in Hope and Witness," maintaining and raising CEC's public profile through CEC media channels.

All CEC programme activities were promoted, providing consistent support to CEC general secretariat, presidency and executive staff, implementing CEC editorial and social media guidelines.

COVID-19 crisis had a special impact on communications. There was an increased demand for information regarding response to the pandemic from CEC and its Member Churches. This led to prompt developments on CEC website, resulting in production of relevant materials. Following cancellation of meetings, communications regarding CEC's upcoming events was updated.

Cooperation especially in response to COVID-19 was carried out with CCME, COMECE, WCC, CALL Network, Eurodiaconia Brussels and Chapel for Europe among others, including some Member Churches. The WCC-REO communication network set up by the WCC in response to the pandemic, meets twice a month to shares updates from all regions including Europe.

## Project implementation

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**Communication Strategy:** Based on findings from 2019, CEC Communication Task Force prepared first draft of the CEC Communication Strategy. Required updates to the draft are made by the CEC communication officer together with the CEC general secretary. The draft in progress intends to reflect CEC's institutional coherence and implementation of the CEC Strategy in organisation's activities.

**Media monitoring:** For the first time, CEC has set up a media monitoring system via [Media Toolkit](#) to record and evaluate the impact of CEC news. The tool provides real-time and automated reports about outreach, online mentions, media value of CEC online materials, providing necessary information to the staff, bringing forth media trends, and improving plans for news coverage.

**Website:** CEC website remains the main hub of all public information. In January, a new design of home page, news and events was launched. Updates were made to the programme pages, continuing with regular maintenance and online publishing.

The webpage "[Church Response to COVID-19](#)" was launched in March. The page remains a dedicated online space showcasing all CEC materials related to COVID-19. The page now features press releases, messages, prayers, reflections and calls to action on the topic.

The page recommends to follow instructions and information from the World Health Organization and local authorities on measures of precaution and mitigation.

The page is also a portal featuring lists of Member Churches, National Councils of Churches and Organisations in Partnership, offering access to their websites for more information.

In 6-months, CEC website reached approximately 9.6 K users with 13 K sessions. Top page preview was /church-response-to-covid-19/ followed by /member-churches/ and /news/.

## CEC News:

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*Featured news promoting CEC Strategy and vision:*

- [Together in Hope and Witness](#)

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*CEC press releases:*

1. [Churches-EU Dialogue: COMECE and CEC meet with the Croatian EU Presidency](#)
2. [European churches to pray, strengthen solidarity as United Kingdom leaves EU](#)
3. [Pope Francis offers blessings to CEC and COMECE on their anniversaries](#)
4. [Churches on EU-Turkey border: Show solidarity, respect rights and human dignity](#)

*COVID related press releases & news items:*

1. [CEC-CCME take necessary measures in response to COVID -19](#)
2. [COVID-19: A prayer for the affected](#)
3. [CEC Presidency: CEC calls on churches to stay united in prayers](#)
4. [WCC REOs statement: "This is a time to touch each other's hearts"](#)
5. [Invited by Pope Francis, churches to unite in Lord's prayer amidst COVID-19](#)
6. [CEC-COMECE joint call: "Let us remain united" amidst COVID-19](#)
7. ["Christ is risen!" - CEC and COMECE presidents offer Easter message](#)
8. [Reflections on Freedom of Religion or Belief during the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
9. [Reflections on the current COVID-19 crisis from CEC's Thematic Group on Education, Democracy and Diversity](#)

*News items:*

1. [CEC and COMECE pray for Christian Unity at the European Parliament](#)
2. [European Green Deal: Preserving our Common Home](#)
3. [Congratulations to Czechoslovak Hussite Church on its 100th Anniversary](#)
4. [ECEN supports "Fridays for Future"](#)
5. [Strengthening relations with churches in Scotland](#)
6. [European Christian Environmental Network Assembly rescheduled for 2021](#)
7. [Christian delegation discusses migration and asylum with Ylva Johansson](#)
8. [CEC congratulates Archbishop Anastasios of Albania on receiving Klaus Hemmerle](#)
9. [Bio for Press: CEC New General Secretary Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen](#)

*Upcoming events:*

1. [7th Summer School on Human Rights \[ONLINE\]](#)
2. [European Regional Pre-Assembly for WCC 11th Assembly](#)
3. [CALL Network: Wellbeing of Digitalized Societies and Work Place](#)
4. [European Christian Environmental Network Assembly](#)

**Weekly Newsletter:** [CEC Weekly Update](#) carried all CEC press releases and news items, plus featuring a selection of updates from members and partners. The newsletter carried over 90 news items in six-month period. The weekly was distributed to 3,047 contacts including 2,260 subscribers via email. The weekly's engagement rate was 14% highly engaged, 20% sometimes engaged, 64% occasionally engaged with top locations: Brussels, Helsinki and Athens, among others since January.

**Social Media:** [CEC Facebook](#) with its 3,068 followers and [CEC Twitter](#) with 2,868 followers gradually increased audience, promoting and sharing content from CEC and its members and partners. New cover designs were published on Facebook and Twitter for an improved visual identity.

Both social media forums witnessed COVID-19 related spike in outreach post February.

[Flicker photo](#) hub was updated and continues to be a resource for illustrations.

**Videos:** A documentary featuring highlights from 6th Summer School on Human Rights Lisbon is in making, addressing freedom of expression, hate speech and populism. The video will be launched on [CEC YouTube channel](#), website and other media in due time.

**Photos:** CEC continued to use stock photos via Shutter Stock subscription, as well as professional photos from Novi Sad Assembly, photos offered via seconded staff, volunteers and from CEC staff. The organisation of photo files in CEC's shared drive was implemented.

**Publications:** Following projects are forthcoming:

1. 2019 Annual Report
2. "Places of Worship and Holy Sites in Europe and the Middle East" with Globethics
3. "Human Rights and Populism" with Globethics

**Media Relations:** Interviews, both in text and video format were conducted with the Christian media. This included WCC news, National Italian Broadcasting Company, Chapel for Europe and TVP Polish TV among others. Media that mentioned CEC included Vatican News, Christian Today, NEV Italian news agency, Evangelische.de, Anglican news, Religión Digital, Church News Ireland to name a few. Due to COVID-19 there was a spike in CEC's coverage with over 100 online mentions in March.

[More details are available in CEC Media Monitoring Reports](#)

**Languages & Translations:** CEC continued to produce communication content mainly in English, with occasional translations of relevant materials in French and German. It was decided to drop Russian translations for the time being due to budgetary reasons and low online response. CEC continued to receive complementary translations offered by Member Churches and partners.

**Branding & Visual Identity:** Branding materials were refurbished in 2019 including banners, brochures, envelopes, CEC publications, business cards, templates and give-aways etc. New items to improve CEC's visual identity are in progress. [CEC Press Centre](#) on website is now up-to-date with logos, bios, photos, latest news and other relevant information and links.