



## Presidency report

### *Check against delivery*

#### **1) Summary**

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In the present period of the pandemic crisis, CEC is functioning well. The organisation's office is administratively fully operational. However, the impact of this crisis will have some consequences on the work that will have been accomplished in view of the next General Assembly.

The other strategic issue that emerges from this report concerns the high expectations addressed to CEC during important political events that call for its action. The treatment of these expectations, which are often contradictory, underlines simultaneously the limitations of our own resources, the importance of collaborations and partnerships as well as the limits of the latter.

#### **2) General remark**

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For the period from May to November 2020, the positioning of the President and his work rhythm has again changed radically. There are two reasons for this.

Firstly, CEC has now had a full time Secretary General since the beginning of 2020. After a phase of discovery, Jorgen Sorensen is fully operational, very diligent to this task, which he is increasingly taking the measure of, despite the restrictions that have impacted international cooperation since the pandemic crisis. With the General Secretary taking up his duties fully, the President can concentrate on his duties, but also better assume his responsibilities within his own church.

Secondly, the pandemic crisis has had a significant impact on churches, not only in their local mission of celebrating God and witnessing to the Gospel, but also in their international ecumenical cooperation. Indeed, all meetings scheduled for 2020 and partially those for 2021 have either been cancelled, postponed, suspended, or reduced to a short videoconference format. To mention a few: The *General European Baptist Congress*, originally scheduled for September 2020 has been postponed to 2022. The ECEN General Assembly, originally scheduled for the end of August 2020 has now been postponed to May 2021. The Hosting Committee of the WCC General Assembly has been reduced to a 3-hour videoconference format. The G20 interfaith meeting in Riyadh and CEC's Summer school were organised and hold in the form of a videoconference. Visits to member churches on the occasion of their synod or assembly have been postponed.



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While work continues, the hugs, coffee taken together, discussions at the table, singing and praying together are sorely missed. Real bursts of laughter are rare in videoconferencing. All in all, a period for me personally, with a slower pace of work for CEC, practically without travel, with the only fatigue caused by the succession of videoconferences.

### **3) Two lines of work**

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Considering that the work of representing and visiting Member Churches has almost been suspended, two main axes characterise the work of the President. The specific institutional functioning of CEC and the handling of politically sensitive events which concentrate sometimes divergent expectations of action on the part of the CEC.

#### **Institutional functioning of CEC**

Since becoming familiar with videoconferencing, the Presidency has become accustomed to meeting several times. The usual one-day meeting halfway between two Governing Boards is dedicated to follow-up work and the preparation of the agenda. Other meetings are convened when the need for consultation so requires. For example, the reassignment of Saint Sophia as a mosque required several short virtual meetings. I will come back to this later.

The main impetus of the institutional work lies in the daily accompaniment of the General Secretary. We continue to have regular weekly videoconferences and add as much contact as necessary during the week. The weekly meetings on Mondays at 8.30 a.m. give rise to an exchange of information, a consultation on current issues, methodological arbitrations, a distribution of tasks if necessary, a comparison of our respective analyses of CEC's situation, regular exchange on the functioning of the office and the situation of staff. In general, it should be stressed that communication between the President and the General Secretary continues to be good and fluid.

During the summer period, we took 2 days to review our cooperation after 6 months and to examine different issues at stake for CEC (staff review, CEC's Call & Witness paper methodology, evaluation of CEC's cooperation, etc.).

#### **Political events and developments that call for action**

Several political events during the last 6 months have concentrated important and sometimes contradictory expectations towards CEC. Let us mention the reassignment of Hagia Sophia as a mosque in Turkey which has created strong emotions within Christianity, not only orthodox, but also at the level of international organisations.

Let us mention here the fire at Camp Moria housing 12,000 migrants on the Greek island of Lesbos.



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Finally, let us mention the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabagh, the suffering it has awakened and the wounds inflicted, not only on the Armenian people, but on all victims of this armed conflict.

In his report, the General Secretary describes how these expectations have been managed, the difficulty that these expectations represent for our organisation, which is not endowed with the resources to treat them as they deserve. I would like to report here on the working mechanisms that have been put in place to take action, because each time we have had to mobilise resources from outside the office. The advice of the Vice-President, Metropolitan Cleopas, has been invaluable in defining our strategy concerning the reassignment of Hagia Sophia.

The expertise and reactivity of CCME, notably by publishing an interpellation from its General Secretary, was relayed by CEC's communication service. However, it seemed essential to me from the outset to take advantage of this tragedy to work on a more fundamental advocacy on the migration issue, which CEC signed with other organisations. The close collaboration with Peter Prove, director of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, and the expertise of his department, which has been monitoring the situation in Nagorno-Karabagh for years, were valuable in understanding the comprehensible emotion of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

I mention this point because the choices we made, namely to send letters to political organisations working on these issues and to relay the communication of partners, are also subject to criticism. CEC must act by itself. It is the voice of the European Churches! It cannot hide behind the expertise, however remarkable it may be, of a partner. Sometimes, some Member Churches have chosen to speak more loudly and therefore more audibly. The Governing Board must keep these questions in mind, both when it is reflecting strategically on the profile of the organisation and when defining the modalities of the partnerships it engages in.

### Cooperation with close partners

In December 2017, CEC signed a partnership agreement with CCME going until 2024. Covering an unusually long period of time for a cooperation agreement, the CEC General Secretary had an exchange with the General Secretary of CCME to discuss the prospects, especially following the discussions on holding the 2023 general assemblies at the same time and in the same place.

We have agreed:

- For the existing CEC-CCME agreement: This should be reviewed in the first half of 2021 and if deemed necessary, amended. Art 9 of the agreement provides for this.
- For the GA 2023:
  - CEC and CCME will organize their 2023 GA in the same location (Estonia)
  - The two GAs will have a common thematic session



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

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- the two organisations will perform a joint symbolic act.

The intention of the refoundation of CEC, decided in Lyon in 2009, implemented with a new CEC constitution in Budapest 2013, is an integration of CCME into CEC. We have been able to appreciate that there are strong arguments in favour of maintaining two separate organisations.

- CCME has more freedom in its advocacy work than a more traditional ecumenical church organisation and due to its decision-making structures can act faster.
- Some National Councils of Churches are members of CCME while they are not members of CEC (they are CEC partners).
- The CEC Constitution does not provide any voting status for churches' specialised ministries and diaconal work institutions (they can conditionally apply for status as Organisation's in Partnership).
- There is a concern that the financial commitment of CEC and CCME Member Churches will be reduced as a result of a merger and costs higher due to different salary levels.

However, in view of the emotion aroused by the fire at Camp Moria, as was the case during the migration crisis in the summer of 2015, a number of voices regretted that there was no stronger statement from an organisation of ecclesial cooperation such as CEC. It will be important to clarify in the near future the strategic direction of this cooperation.

The WCC General Assembly in Karlsruhe, originally scheduled for September 2021, is now scheduled for 31 August to 8 September 2022. Its organisation is taken care of by two structures, on the one hand the Assembly Planning Committee reporting to the WCC in Geneva and covering the coordination of the overall running of the general assembly, the organisation of thematic and business sessions, and finances. On the other hand, a Hosting Committee, chaired by Bishop Petra Bosse-Hubert and Bishop Jochen Cornelius Bundschuh, is responsible for the local programme for General Assembly delegates and visitors expected to attend the event, and for the organisation of the programme of visits planned for 3 and 4 September in the vicinity of Karlsruhe.

I would like to point out here CEC's involvement in the organisation of this important event. Katerina Pekridou is a member of the Assembly planning committee. CEC is organising a Pre-Assembly of European delegates in Warsaw, now rescheduled for 25-27 February 2022. CEC has also made proposals for a plenary session on Europe Day. Several members of the executive staff are already mobilised for the hosting programme that will propose 11 thematic work places, some of which are in line with the essential elements of the CEC strategic plan, "together in hope and witness".