



Governing Board, Online 18-19 Nov 2020
Agenda Item: 5
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Report by the General Secretary

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Introduction

Meeting virtually with the Governing Board in June 2020, we dared to dream of a return to relative normality in the autumn, allowing a physical meeting in November this year. Our dreams did not come true. And as we gather electronically for the second time of the year, Covid-19 is ravaging Europe – and indeed the world – with renewed power, leaving societies and citizens frustrated and bewildered. Whereas we gradually build knowledge of the long term health issues related to Covid-19, nobody seems to have an overview of the long term impact of the Coronavirus on life patterns and wider society.

The Conference of European Churches too is hit by the current pandemic. Very concretely so, as already described in my report to the Governing Board in June. As we enter the month of November, the Ecumenical Centre in Brussels and the CEC office in Strasbourg are again empty, with members of the team working from home. Belgium and France are among the hardest hit countries, counting new daily cases of Covid-19, hospitalisations and deaths. Hence, the two governments have introduced strict measures to reduce the spread of contamination.

Two significant items relating to the current crisis have drawn particular attention from the General Secretariat of CEC. Firstly, monitoring the development in wider society, including the regularly issued guidelines from governments in the two countries that host CEC offices, to comply with regulations. And secondly, organising the workflow of a staff team faced with



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unfamiliar working conditions both internally and externally. The activity reporting, tabled today, witnessing to the fact that CEC is steadily moving on, albeit in fashions unlike the ones anticipated at the beginning of the year.

The current report of the General Secretary is not an activity report but a managerial report, pertaining to the operating of the organisation and the related strategies. Working days in the general secretariat – even during lock-down with its limitations of travel and personal encounters - are varied and multifaceted. Below I focus on issues and items that play or will come to play a major role in the sustainability of the organisations currently and/or in the future and which I believe need the attention of the Governing Board.

Finance

So as to not only survive but also thrive and develop, CEC needs a strong financial foundation. This can - and indeed must - be interpreted in two different ways.

Firstly, CEC needs financial resources to fulfil its visions and goals. No revenues equal no activities. For that reason, the Governing Board previously requested that finance and budget-related matters are dealt with at the beginning of the Governing Board meetings. This move safeguards that decisions made by the Governing Board can be measured against the financial capacity of the organisation.

Secondly, we need a strong analytical basis to plan and exercise due diligence on financial matters. Since the Governing Board meeting in June this year, I have spent much energy together with Head of Finance, Administration and Payroll, Georgios Maglis, securing and analysing historical data relating to revenue and expenditure. The findings will be presented during the current meeting and are an important database for planning and forecasting future activities.

Along with historical facts, we are developing procedures that will provide us with a much more precise picture of how we spend the money entrusted us by CEC Member Churches. In other words, the intention is to enhance the sense of stewardship within the organisation. We believe that the new budget and accounting measures will help to reach that goal. But also better awareness of how we as staff spend our time will increase our level of accountability.¹

Based on such collected and improved data it is my pledge to the Governing Board that no future actions plans or major project proposals will be presented for your approval without clearly defined calculations on the financial impact they will have on the organisation. The managerial intention is that we avoid initiatives that overload the financial capacity and that we

¹ CEC is not time-registering hours pertaining to projects or activities with each staff member. For this reason, there is no overview of human resources allocated to projects or activities which makes it a challenge to analyse and evaluate the cost-benefit impact of both the individual and the collective efforts of the organisation and its staff members. Taking into consideration that CEC is a knowledge-based organisation with approximately 60% (2019) of its expenditures relating to salaries, the immediate benefits of a move towards better accountability in this area are obvious.



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secure proper allocation of human resources available. Bringing in new responsibilities means letting go of others unless external funding can be made available.²

As mentioned above, however, CEC needs financial resources to fulfil its visions and goals. A decrease in revenue means a decrease in the activities of the organisation. The Finance Desk is currently monitoring the movements on the revenue side meticulously to spot trends and developments. This, in particular, remains paramount as we know some of our Member Churches struggle financially during the Covid-19 crisis which may have an impact on the revenue side of the organisation in 2021 and beyond.

We are closely monitoring the developments and have already received information that some churches struggle whereas others have saved due to fewer activities this year and hence consider contributing additionally to CEC. Approaching larger Member Churches directly, however, have resulted in oral pledges for the expected amounts this year.

Reminders will be dispatched to Member Churches with remaining of outstanding payments for 2020 over the coming weeks and be repeated at the end of the year if need be. In general, we plan to design better follow-up procedures and closer monitoring of Member Church contributions for the years to come.

Association des Propriétaires (AssProp)

Together with Churches' Commission on Migrants in Europe (CCME) CEC is the co-owner (CEC 2/3 and CCME 1/3) of the Ecumenical Centre, Rue Joseph II, in Brussels. The Ecumenical Centre hosts the two owners' secretariats and currently four tenants in the shape of external organisations of varying size and purpose, however all with church-related background. To reflect the true running costs of CCME and CEC, and to build up savings for future maintenance and renovations, the two organisations pay a monthly rent to the Association des Propriétaires which has been set up as the legal entity covering the Centre.

The Ecumenical Centre is a significant asset to CEC and CCME as a well-kept property in one of the most attractive areas of the European Quarters of Brussels. The Centre, hence, requires our attention as a building and as a potential source of income. The actual administration is covered by CEC's Head of Finance, Administration and Payroll, Georgios Maglis, and the expenses in this regard shared between the co-owners. Tenants pay according to various contractual frameworks.

I have together with General Secretary of CCME, Torsten Moritz, over the summer reinvigorated monthly decision-making meetings on the planning, management and administration of the property and office space available. This has led to analyses of the economy of the building and the Association des Propriétaires which show that expenses related to the management and

² Cf. e.g. the section "EU Application – Protection of Holy Sites" below.



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maintenance of the building are not properly covered by the revenue from our four tenants and our share of the monthly rent.

More details including initial plans for enhanced transparency of contracts and the eventual draw-up of a more sustainable business plan will be shared at the upcoming Governing Board meeting.

Communication Strategy

The Governing Board, at its meeting in November 2018 appointed a Communication Task Force under the chairmanship of Governing Board member Anders B. Gadegaard and participation of Governing Board member Emma Johnson. Some of the initial findings were tabled at the Governing Board meeting in November 2019 and in late spring the Task Force presented its work to the General Secretary and Naveen Qayyum, CEC Communication Officer. It was at that time decided that due to changes in the secretariat incl. reduction in communication staff from two to one full-time position, the strategy was to be finalised by the secretariat.

The work of the Task Force pinpointed the need for a more strategic approach to communication³ which has in the final version, attached to this report, been acknowledged i.a. through the identification of a more targeted audience. Taking into consideration the financial perspectives of the organisation, CEC at the end of 2019 cut some of the resources previously allocated to communication. Obviously, this comes at a price. The strategy is designed to be manageable by one communication staff and requires close cooperation between the Communication Officer and the individual executive secretaries as well as elimination of programmatic activity by the communication desk.

The communication strategy (Appendix 1), thus, must be seen as a tool for the entire organisation and not only the communication desk. The two sides of the organisation are highly inter-dependent. Thus, it is the programmatic work of CEC that defines what must be communicated, whereas the communication desk – drawing on the professional skills of the Communication Officer - defines how the communication takes place.⁴ Consequently, we have created a strategy that will cater also for an organisation which may, eventually, prioritise differently when it comes to programmatic work.

Information Technology (IT)

Early May 2019, CEC was hit by a major cyber-attack caused by ransom-ware intruding on our in-house server. This meant that large amounts of data was locked-up and inaccessible to CEC staff team. The incident led to a change in IT-consultancy, but the last remaining data has been recovered only recently. The attack revealed serious weaknesses in our old IT-set up, partly

³ The groundwork and investigations initiated by the Task Force through i. a. interviews with staff also revealed the need for better internal communication between staff to secure a comprehensive and efficient workflow. These valuable insights have influenced not only the Communication Strategy but also forms a significant background to the discussion paper “CEC’s Call and Witness” presented to the Governing Board in its Thursday session.

⁴ The strategy thus entails improved inter-organisational communication, cf. IT section below.



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caused by lack of security measures, out-dated soft-and hard ware, and partly due to insufficiently awareness of cyber-crime and -security.

The incident has led to tightened security measures and investment in new soft- and hardware. The increased number of working hours spent from home has also initiated a gradual exchange of stationary office desk-top computers with contemporary laptops enabling improved mobility and enhanced work flexibility. CEC administered, staff laptops will at the same time minimise the risk of security breaches, and eventually make the use of unsecure private PCs at home obsolete, increasing the IT security level as such.

Covid-19 and its consequences with regard to home working has led to investments in better video-conference software and we are currently with our IT-consultant building the infrastructure for a number of communication applications under the umbrella of Microsoft 365, incl. intranet and the ability to work in real-time on shared documents. These are features requested by Thematic Groups working on common documents, but such will also benefit the workflow among employed staff, including interaction between executive secretaries and the Communication Desk, and eventually secretariat communication with the Governing Board and with the General Assembly participants.

Immediate action and advocacy

Over the last six months, CEC encountered several events in Europe which called for what is here termed “immediate action and advocacy”, most significantly – even if a very varying nature - the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, large demonstrations and political unrest in Belarus, the fire in the Moria Camp in Lesbos, hostilities and armed conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabagh and most recently terrorist actions in France (Nice) and Austria (Vienna).

There is a tradition, a request and a need for CEC to take action on events of this kind. CEC has done so in all cases mentioned above, either by solid advocacy letters to European or other international organisations in Brussels, Strasbourg and elsewhere (Hagia Sophia, Belarus, Moria Camp⁵ and Nagorno-Karabagh⁶) or with letters of solidarity to Member Churches or other churches in the countries affected (France and Austria).

Due to the varying nature of incidents and events that call for a response from European Churches, it is hardly possible to create streamlined procedures that will guarantee proper and timely action with no delay from CEC’s side. The delicate political nature of these events in itself is an obstacle to such. Each incident represents new complexities. On top of this, the CEC secretariat is not currently equipped with human resources that in parallel with day-to-day business can devote time and effort to immerse themselves fully to unexpected incidents calling for “immediate action and advocacy”.

⁵ Due to the agreed allocation of tasks and responsibilities between CEC and CCME, this was done in close cooperation with CCME.

⁶ Due to the complex nature of the Nagorno-Karabagh events, CEC teamed up with World Council of Churches (WCC) to enhance the impact via a concerted effort.



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In a best case scenario, CEC would possess a network within the political institutions with easy access to key players who can be activated early on in an up-coming process. CEC does have a large network available and also human resources in-house that can produce forceful advocacy for distribution by the Communication Desk. This must be recognised and applauded. In the mentioned cases responses have been coordinated from the general secretariat and are believed to have had some impact. Follow-up however, could certainly be better, and activation of Member Churches with a view to a concerted action has been virtually non-existent.

Why do I mention this in the current report? Because I wish to draw the attention of the Governing Board to the fact that during the last six months my observation is that CEC is not currently equipped to respond with the most efficient “immediate action and advocacy”. As an interim attempt to increase our capabilities, the secretariat has over recent weeks developed a “workflow diagram” which defines the responsibility of the individual staff member and members of the Presidency who are typically involved from the governing, political side. However, more attention is needed if CEC is due to hold its position as the prime church-based advocacy institution in Brussels and Strasbourg catering for Member Churches in need of that. This is a continuing challenge that has my utmost attention.

EU Application – Protection of Holy Sites

CEC runs a number of projects in parallel, most of them supported by external human assistance via resources belonging to the Thematic Groups. The Governing Board will also find references to such activities in the activity reports of the executive secretaries at this meeting. Let me, however, highlight an initiative that is breaking new ice compared to previous models and that – if successful - may become a model to be followed in the future.

CEC in September 2020 filed an application to the European Commission regarding measures to protect holy sites. CEC is part of a consortium including European Jewish Congress (lead agency), The European Buddhist Association and the Ireland based Muslim organisation Faith Matters. These are organisations that are not unknown to CEC. CEC participates upon invitation from the Commission where CEC via executive secretary Elizabeta Kitanovic has had a seat in an expert group on the matter for some time. The result of the application will be revealed only in May 2021. Duration of the project is May 2021 - May 2023.

The consortium will - if the application is approved a) develop content, videos, brochures, guidelines, guides, training material etc., b) based on the content train the trainers on the use of this content and c) disseminate content through communication and briefings in and around religious communities and responsible authorities. There are several reasons to have taken this step.

- Firstly, it is an important piece of work keeping in mind the attacks we have seen over the last decade(s) – most lately in Nice, France, and it is to be applauded that the Commission takes the problem seriously and also cares about the rising populism Europe witnesses.



Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the Commission points to CEC, acknowledging our expertise.

- Secondly, in view of both anticipated and confirmed decreasing membership contributions⁷, CEC needs gradually and creatively to find new financial means. The Jewish Congress will be leading this consortium and draw the vast majority of funds but CEC will also benefit, funds covering parts of salaries, office space etc. In parallel, this is an opportunity for CEC to learn what EU applications demand (staff already joined training sessions re. the issue).
- Thirdly, this is a concrete example of CEC working to the benefit of Member Churches, doing some ground-breaking work that they (first and foremost minor ones with less human and financial resources) are not able to handle individually. In a best-case scenario this will enhance the ownership among Member Churches if the project succeeds in communicating the objectives and outcome well.

The Thematic Group on Human Rights will play a pivotal role in implementing the project. The theme "Protection of Holy Sites" will form the thematic background for the 2021 Summer School on Human Rights and is in this way linked to wider strategic activities in CEC. This, again, reduces the plethora of minor areas and themes associated with CEC while still staying within the strategic Human Rights goals of the organisation.

Speaking Hope

We are going through strange times. So-called "social distancing" in times of a pandemic contradicts our self-image as churches: Community and presence. At the heart of our Christian community lies fellowship. Holy Communion as a physical affirmation of common identity; the sign of peace as a gesture of reconciliation and mutual love; hymn singing as an act of gathering into shared fellowship. However, all this has not been possible in a concrete, shared physical space for prolonged periods of 2020.

I have been invited to speak on a couple of occasions during recent months. Both on the Covid-19 impact on churches and on the role of churches in a time of a crisis such as the one we go through. Partly in events organised by the European Institutions, the Parliament and the Commission, and partly in panels set up by the EPP group in the European Parliament.

Churches in Europe represent a diversity of responses to the recent developments. For some, restrictions have stirred theological questions re. the nature of church community and holy communion. For others online prayers have resulted in new and hitherto unknown interest from the public. I think most churches have reached out to the most vulnerable and lonely in our locked-down societies.

⁷ Anticipated in the aftermath of Covid-19 financial challenges and confirmed in the case of EKD, significant cut-backs over 10 years. See also "Finance" above.



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

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Former vice-chair of the European Parliament and current Commissioner Mairead McGuinness in The Irish Times, March 25, at the very beginning of the pandemic in Europe, expressed herself in this way:

"This pandemic is proving too big a challenge to face alone. Solidarity is, and will be, central to finding the cure and keeping us all safe into the future..."

I think she had first and foremost classical politically induced "solidarity" in mind. However, knowing her relationship to and understanding of churches from her time as the responsible MEP for dialogue with faith-traditions and as a personally committed church-goer, she may well in her wording have thought of the role of faith as well. And certainly, her words *"This pandemic is proving too big a challenge to face alone"* to me gives a clear indication that we as vulnerable human beings can only turn to God for help.

In this way, in my public presentations over recent months, I have highlighted prayer as a sign of hope and fellowship. Maybe the most important role of the church during the current pandemic has been and is the call for prayer. As a reminder of our vulnerability and perishability, a cue to us that as humans we are not always in control, but also a sign of the Church as a world-wide fellowship of mutual encouragement, praying for the healing of our communities.

Praying together becomes a powerful vaccine against the loss of hope, against the absence of communal resilience and against the lack of human sustainability – *"finding the cure and keeping us all safe into the future"*.

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Thank you for your attention.

I look forward to our discussions and future cooperation.

Jørgen Skov Sørensen
General Secretary

Description – Background

<i>Description</i>	<p>Communication is fundamental to CEC. It is an essential tool to raise CEC's public profile, highlighting the uniqueness of a Christian fellowship strengthened by CEC's 114 Member Churches across Europe, and promoting the impact of programmatic activities, sustaining influence and gaining visibility.</p>
<i>Theological and Biblical Foundation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEC communication must have strong theological and biblical foundation at its core. The content should inspire CEC Member Churches to witness together, encourage spirituality, reflection and formation, highlighting the diversity within the CEC constituency. • Inspired by “You shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8) – theme of the 2018 Novi Sad Assembly of CEC, communication must follow the core Christian and ecumenical values of the organisation in all its activities. • CEC communication should promote CEC's vision “Together in Hope and Witness” as defined by the CEC Strategic Priorities 2019–2023 – and as reflected in CEC programmatic activities as a central theme.

Implementing CEC Strategic Priorities

<i>Focus</i>	<p>The primary focus of CEC communication is to integrate its work into the strategic objectives of CEC, these objectives being:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promoting peace, justice and reconciliation in Europe 2. Strengthening ecumenical fellowship and promoting the mission of the Church 3. Raising churches' voice in Europe and the European Institutions.
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Goals and Planned Outcomes

<i>Objectives</i>	<p>Ensuring relevant, credible, focused, strategic and well-coordinated communication in a timely manner.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising churches' public voice in Europe and European Institutions • Strengthening European church fellowship • Adding visibility to CEC's work and its impact
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Audience to Reach, Engage and Inspire

Description CEC audience is primarily a European audience. In current figures, CEC contact list for external communications contains 3,047 email addresses including 2,260 subscribers as well as 150 Christian media contacts. CEC has around 3,000 followers on each of its social media pages, with a gradual increase.

- Targeted audience*
- CEC Member Churches
 - European Institutions
 - Christian Media

How to Achieve Strategic Objectives

- Channels*
- Websites (CEC website & related websites)
 - Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr)
 - Webinars, digital platforms (GoToMeeting)
 - Weekly newsletter
- Other Activities*
- Media monitoring
 - Branding, promotional materials and visual identity
 - Training and capacity building

Purpose **Raising churches' public voice in Europe**

- Strategy*
- a. CEC communication will highlight issues addressed by CEC programme activities. CEC will develop communication plans and will strategize together with the secretariat and staff, targeting media and public institutions for higher visibility.
 - b. Communication planning will be carried out, using templates, cooperating with relevant partners, specifying short and long-term objectives and outcomes, key messages, audience, channels, budget, staffing and consultancy roles.

- c. CEC communication will enhance its contact lists and networking, working with Christian communicators and EU contacts, targeting media.
- d. CEC communication will refine its output, especially distinguishing press releases, features etc.
- e. CEC communication will implement plans and provide media monitoring reports via Media Toolkit to CEC staff tracking key indicators of outreach, media coverage, web and social media analytics.
- f. A cost effective and focused approach to CEC publications will be implemented.
- g. CEC communication will continue to collaborate with close partners or related networks on issues of common concern (CCME, CALL, ESA etc.). Due to the limited resources, efficient and realistic goals will be set up and new way of working will be devised upon consultation with the general secretariat.
- h. CEC Communication Desk will plan in a timely manner communication for CEC's next General Assembly, adapting to any changes.
- i. Digital platforms will be exploited to achieve strategy objectives. Projects will be implemented related to webinars, video recordings and livestreaming of CEC events, effectively using CEC website and social media. This must be seen especially as a post COVID-19 scenario with limited physical meetings.

Purpose

Strengthening European church fellowship

Strategy

- a. CEC communication will cooperate with Member Church communicators to map expertise and opportunities for better impact and visibility.
- b. Communication expertise and capacity within the Member Churches and partners will be encouraged for sharing, and facilitated by CEC communication (for instance, churches and organisations may cover events on behalf of the entire fellowship, sharing their material through CEC)
- c. CEC communication will regularly emphasise content depicting fellowship and life of its Member Churches through sharing of images

and stories etc.

- d. CEC communication will highlight diversity of people in its Member Churches, to ensure balance of men and women, young and old, Christian traditions, geographic locations as represented in its public materials.
- e. CEC’s editorial, social media and visual identity guidelines will be developed and implemented. CEC communication will provide such guidelines (especially on how to encourage and handle debate), and will organise trainings.
- f. CEC communication staff will work closely with the general secretariat, in order to support CEC presidency and the executive staff in updating and developing information for public and media.
- g. CEC communication will facilitate networking and opportunities for collaboration with communicators in partner organisations in Brussels.

Purpose

Adding to CEC’s visibility, reaching audience

4

Strategy

- a. The CEC general secretary and the CEC President depending on the nature of the content will be CEC’s official spokesperson to the media. Executive secretaries will make comment or can be interviewed related to their area of work. All spokespersons must follow CEC guidelines and strategic objectives.
- b. To keep the process of news centralised, the CEC general secretary will approve all press releases, statements and public messages meant to be distributed to all contacts and media.
- c. Staff will have the opportunity for training and capacity building to incorporate strategic communication in their programmes and to better understand use of communication channels.
- d. Effective communication requires sufficient human and financial resources. A structure and budget, including communication-related expectations for all programmes, should be clear and sufficient.
- e. In identifying its priority in advocacy areas, CEC commits to speaking prophetically and courageously, being prepared to react and respond appropriately to a controversy.

- f. Requests for review of communication material should be responded in a timely manner by all staff, including requests from media. News is always time sensitive and only a timely response ensures impact.
- g. CEC communication will strengthen its capacity and use of professional photos and videos to convey strategic messages, following media trends.
- h. CEC communication will use the opportunities to work together with churches, ecumenical, and non-governmental institutions and networks.
- i. CEC communication will continue to work in English as a principal language for all its public materials, including selected items in French and German. CEC materials produced by Member Churches in other European languages will be featured.

Resources to implement Communication Strategy (financial, human capital)

<i>Description</i>	<p>CEC currently has one professional staff person dedicated to all communication efforts. All staff, however, have communication responsibilities internally and externally. All staff have a shared role in ensuring that CEC’s communication is timely, targeted and effective.</p>	5
<i>Communication Officer</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Communications Officer works directly with the general secretary and executive staff on all aspects of communication. The Communication Officer is responsible for building CEC’s public profile and promote its programmes through a range of activities. She is responsible for implementing the CEC Communication Strategy, carrying out tasks such as news, media relations, social media and branding and is editor of the CEC website, social media and CEC Annual Report. • Staff Responsible: Naveen Qayyum • Contact details: naveen@cec-kek.be 	
<i>Admin Assistant</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative Assistant provides support in areas such as administration, technical support, branding and promotion of online events, proofreading, filing, Mail Chimp and website maintenance. • Staff Responsible: Vanessa Barreto • Contact details: barreto@cec-kek.be 	
<i>Outsourcing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web hosting, technical maintenance and designing • Graphic designing and printing 	

*Secondments
from Member
Churches &
volunteers*

- Video production and editing
- Photography

- News writing
- Media relations
- Photography
- Videography
- Capacity building and training