



Governing Board
Agenda Item: 9
Document Name:
2GB2020_DOC9C EDU AND SCI
Purpose: For information

## Activity Report

### Education, Democracy and Diversity & Science, New Technologies and Christian Ethics

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

##### Bioethics – new challenges with biomedicine

This year's Nobel Prize for Chemistry went to the gene researchers Emmanuelle Charpentier from France and Jennifer Doudna from the USA. Both have independently developed the so-called CRISP/CAS9 gene scissors, which allow relatively uncomplicated genetic modifications to be carried out.

In the November meeting of the Steering Committee, in which CEC participated as an observer, the question was discussed whether this new technology needed a new legal framework in the Oviedo Convention for Human Rights and Biomedicine.

A major point of contention in the Steering committee for Bioethics will be the further development of genome editing. The main question is to what extent the legal framework provided by the European Bioethics Convention of Human Rights and Biomedicine<sup>1</sup> is enough for new techniques. During this meeting, CEC was able to refer again to its comments on this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Oviedo Convention: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bioethics/oviedo-convention>



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## Education policies

In its October meeting, the Steering Committee for Education Policy and Practice dealt extensively with the consequences of the corona crisis for education worldwide.

Several webinars, with the participation of the CEC Executive Secretary, dealt with the accessibility of digital learning opportunities for socially disadvantaged and ethical issues.

In the future CEC will monitor closely the developments and discussions on intercultural learning (diversity learning) and ethics in education with in the steering committee.

In its 17th session, the Steering Committee on Bioethics decided to clarify Art. 13 of the Oviedo Convention regarding new technologies of genome editing. In this meeting CEC was able to clarify the different positions of its Member Churches and to point out that any intervention in human germlines has inevitable consequences for future generations. The concepts of "reliability" and "safety" should be re-examined and the responsibility of today's research had to be considered.

## Conference of International non-governmental Organisations with the Council of Europe (INGO) <sup>2</sup>

The Conference of Christian NGOs, where CEC has a seat, has adopted after discussion in the plenary two recommendations and one resolution<sup>3</sup> :

- Recommendation and contribution of the Conference of INGOs to the statutory revision process of the Pompidou Group<sup>4</sup>
- Recommendation in support of the Istanbul Convention<sup>5</sup>
- Resolution on access to digital technology in Europe and the responsibility of member States

The next session will take place in December 2020 where the new statutory of the Conference of INGOs will be discussed.

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<sup>2</sup> The Conference of INGOs is the representative body of the INGOs holding participatory status with the Council of Europe. Its plenary meetings are an occasion for dialogue with the bodies of the Council of Europe and for exchange amongst its members.

The plenary Conference decides on policy lines and actions and adopts positions on fundamental issues and sends them in the form of Recommendations or Resolutions to other Council of Europe bodies, to other international or national institutions as well as to the media. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/home>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/texts-adopted#{%2210852597%22:\[0\]}](https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/texts-adopted#{%2210852597%22:[0]})

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/pompidou>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/>



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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 (TG) 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<sup>6</sup>

Under the chairmanship of Bianca Kappelhof, Comenius Institute Münster, the Thematic Group has held several online meetings since June 2020, with the following result:

- A working group is going to develop a concept for a Webinar on the issue of “populism” according to the GB decision in its meeting of December 2019.<sup>7</sup>
- The TG will draw up a strategic action plan according to the list of issues and the General Strategic plan of CEC. A number of key points have been identified (such as: *Education: religious illiteracy, democracy: trust and solidarity, diversity: conviviality project, values, peacebuilding initiatives, same-sex-marriage/blessing in the Church*) and will be prioritised and carried over into an action plan later this year.
- The proposal of an online Panel at the [Ökumenischer Kirchentag](#) in Frankfurt 2021 was accepted. The title will be: *Complex world - simplistic answer? Exploring how European Churches give orientation*

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### TG Science, New Technologies and Christian Ethics<sup>8</sup>

The Thematic Group, chaired by Julija Vidovic-Naett, according to the CEC global strategic plan, plans the following actions:

- Starting a survey within Member Churches to identify the current topics in Science, New Technologies and Christian Ethics. The survey will be ready at the end of the year.
- Developing a toolkit on the issue of *Genome editing and beginning of life issues/prenatal diagnostics*
- Establishing a pool of experiences, impressions and questions from the Member Churches, which should make it possible to work through the corona crisis. The members of the TG are invited to share contributions, ethical questions in a common pool.
- The TG adopted a dynamic action plan quickly adaptable to the rapid developments in science and research

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<sup>6</sup> You can find all decisions in the minutes of the TG.

<sup>7</sup> 2GB2019\_Doc24 Draft Mins Nov2019\_final

<sup>8</sup> You can find all decisions in the minutes of the TG.



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

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As response to the EU Commission's White Paper on Artificial Intelligence - A European Approach to excellence and trust, COM(2020) 65 and the Report on the safety and liability implications of Artificial Intelligence, the Internet of Things and robotics, COM (2020) 64 the TG submitted a paper<sup>9</sup> where the TG brought forward the main issues concerning AI:

1. Anthropological issues and Human Dignity
2. Religious discrimination and Freedom of Religion and Belief
3. Concerns on Social impacts of AI
4. Ecological issues concerning AI

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

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

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

The CEC Executive Secretary in Strasbourg who is also coordinator of the Conference of Churches on the Rhine, is a member of the regional planning team for the WCC General Assembly 2021 in Karlsruhe.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12270-White-Paper-on-Artificial-Intelligence-a-European-Approach/public-consultation> ; you find the paper of the TG in the section for download "documents annexed to contributions" under the name:  
F529850-TG\_SCI\_White\_Paper\_final\_15.06.2020.pdf