

What future for Europe?
Contribution of churches to building a community of values
CEC on the way towards the Assembly 2018
Nordic-Baltic consultation
16-18 March 2017, Reykjavik, Iceland

Summary and outcomes of the discussion

At the consultation 36 delegates participated from churches in Nordic-Baltic region and guests from other parts of the continent. Key note presentations were given by Archbishop Anders Wejryd (Church of Sweden) and Margrete Auken (Denmark) a Member of the European Parliament. Discussions focused on 4 thematic clusters: Europe and relations between Europe and the EU, including the engagement of churches in society and dialogue with politics, values, theology, and the role and expectations towards the CEC and its upcoming Assembly.

1. Europe

In discussions on how Europe is defined it was underlined that for churches and the CEC it is “Europe” and not primarily about geography. Europe must be neither narrowly limited to the EU, nor identified with any other political concepts or institutions such as the Council of Europe or OSCE. Europe in the Christian understanding is more related to culture and sources feeding our identity.

How do we promote a European narrative? We have to improve our story telling abilities, to learn more about ourselves and each other, about our churches and their relationships to the state, and regardless of denomination, we need to know the effect it has on us. Who are we together? What connects us? What can we do together? Churches should be those who help to facilitate discussions about Europe. At the same time churches should highlight the importance of the relationship of Europe with other continents and promote partnerships with other parts of the world.

Churches have a responsibility to work for a better Europe, a better EU. In this respect the order of questions we are asking is important. It is important to begin with the *why* of things, rather than the *how*.

There is a need for a diversity of opinions concerning Europe, and values related to Europe. How is this diversity related to European identity? The question of European identity needs to be taken from the top political and academic level down to the local and grassroots level. We need to learn more from each other, so that we can appreciate our diversity and fully respect differences and variety.

It was underlined that there is a need for more common action.

1.1. Relation to EU/ politics/society

Churches have a responsibility to work for a better Europe and better EU. In times when populism is catching fire in Europe, we need to deal with people’s fears. We do not live anymore in a post-war situation, but dark clouds are rolling over again. We need another kind of hope and we need to work for it.

Engagement in society and dialogue with politics is of significant importance for the church. The aim of such a dialogue is first of all to point to injustice, whenever and wherever it is needed. It is not the task for the churches always to say how to solve it. *‘We can talk about goals and aims, but it is best to leave the tools on how to do it to the politicians.’* Churches should be in their contributions more concrete, strong and articulate, they do not need necessarily to be politically correct.

The consultation expressed the strong voice of churches from the region in expressing their positive experience with the functioning of political institutions and trust to various institutions, including the European institutions. There is a largely positive experience of churches from the region with the European project. The need to promote the European project was expressed.

At the same time it was underlined that there is the need for a diversity of opinions about Europe, EU and values in Europe. Churches should find a language on how to talk together about political institutions and the positive role of these institutions. Relationships to political institutions need to be included in the discussion at the CEC Assembly. The functioning of the economy and economic justice, including the biblical idea of household and the need of taking care of each other, need to be integrated into the discussion.

2. Values

There is the need to strengthen the vision of the EU as a community of values. The value base is important as a platform for any activity.

Who does define the meaning of values? Democracy for example can mean different things in different contexts. Can we find a common ground for values? Discussions on values will be never without tensions, there is the need to talk to each other in spite of tension, in spite of diversity.

Europe needs deep, personal and vivid talks about what values we do want to raise. What is really important for us? What changes of priorities are we ready to make in order to honour these values and visions? When one starts from the basic need and prioritize from them, we are drawn together. Churches and theology are good in doing things like this, if they just dare to speak out. That makes a difference for Europe. This is not the role for states. It is not their role.. Special attention should be attributed to values such as grace, dignity, sacredness and reconciled diversity from churches' perspective.

There is a need to find a new approach to values. It is important to find relevant values! Values should guide us in our thinking and acting and offer the answer to the question where do we want to go. The major problem in this regard is our credibility.

3. Theology

To the question: Has theology a place in the current discourse about Europe? the consultation clearly answered: yes. Strong addition to this statement is that this 'yes' has to be qualified, though. It was pointed out that: *'theology without Church is not a good idea. Church without theology is even worse. And both of them need life outside the Church, outside of theology. The door of the church always has to be open for people to get out. It is out there, that life is supposed to be lived, in society. The doctrine of Trinity is extremely important in that respect.'*

Instead of an overemphasis on deductive theology, the need for more inductive theology to was expressed. Theology always needs the church, always needs society. Learned discourse between church, theology and society is helpful for all. Theology which is needed in talk about Europe has to be related to life, relevant and filled with Christian identity. The tension between relevance and identity can be hard, but, as it was stressed: *'Jesus comes to offer unexpected help, when we realize that so much of his identity is precisely relevant for life, relevant for people, relevant for change and relevant for hope.'*

Church and theology need to be anchored in local situations and discourse. It is decisive to respect parishioners. Church and theology should never underestimate the knowledge of parishioners. It is in congregations where people see each other, respect each other, regardless of knowledge and social standing. We need to bring this experience back to society. Key words in this respect are: solidarity, respect and constructive acceptance of interdependence. History shows how much we share and appreciate together regardless of culture, country and centuries. Churches have a responsibility to teach and to live that kind of history.

The importance of anthropology was highlighted. For the church it is important to meet those who are outside the church, 'those others.' *'We are sent to each other, all of us. Grace can only be accepted if it is given by someone who has our lasting respect. God, as we met him in Jesus Christ, has that respect from us. The person of Jesus Christ has to be made known, lifted up and repeatedly reminded of in our contemporary*

societies. This is the task of theology and churches.’ In this context it is important to keep in mind that openness and fullness can thrive only in tensions. It was proposed that: ‘Maybe this knowledge is something which theology and church should bring to the European public.’

Through faith we dare to think that the weak should be protected, the criminal given a second chance, wealth shared, the refugee welcomed, the world should be stewarded, not owned and worn out by us. If we, as Christians and churches don’t speak out on this, we are guilty of treason. We are then keeping something hidden from Europe. The key word in this respect is hope - there is hope for people in Europe. Questions which need to be answered in this respect are: how can we be concrete in discourse about hope? What is the content of this hope? Diaconia and fellowship can be taken as common ground for this hope. Koinonia, fellowship, is the term that has value in current talks about Europe. In koinonia is a space to talk as well about oikonomia, as the term in which is integrated the vision of household and service one to another. Leading words should be in this respect those reminding that: *‘you are the light of the world,’* and the vision of Christianity which is fighting big powers as e.g. finances, military, and others. The language of diaconia and koinonia should be extended by talks about common prayer.

4. Expectations and wishes towards the CEC and its upcoming Assembly

In discussing the experience of the churches from the region with CEC, and their wishes and expectations towards the CEC and the upcoming Assembly, the following points were underlined:

- CEC is an important instrument of the churches. We should keep CEC as a forum for real discussion, getting to know each other better and building fellowship.
- We are stronger when we work together, even if we don’t agree – the key is to disagree as well. In this respect an expectation for the Assembly was expressed, which should be a place for openness, even in addressing the issues on which we will not agree.
- CEC is a tool holder, maybe one that can help local churches in their various tasks, maybe even a tool in helping relations with Russia and with the East and better understanding of the specific history in the eastern part of the continent including communism. When CEC was founded, there was a great willingness to overcome divisions and build bridges. Charta Oecumenica is an important instrument in helping in this regard.
- At the past CEC Assemblies, there was the need to overcome wounds, but more positive impacts lie ahead.
- How CEC can be an instrument for inviting minority churches to the discussion and for opening the space for them in a dialogue? Majority churches should feel responsible for the inclusion of minority churches. The major problem is our credibility. There is a tension between majority and minority churches, which needs to be overcome.
- We need to listen carefully and bring in voices that are not speaking out for themselves, how to speak to young people who do not use the language of the church anymore.
- There is the need for CEC to address the interreligious situation we face.
- The upcoming CEC Assembly will not be able to provide the right answers if we don’t start with a right question: why? Why are we here? Why do we have an assembly? If we just talk about ‘what’ and ‘how,’ then the aim is not right.

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