

CEC Consultation process on Future of Europe

Summary of received reactions to the Open letter

CEC letter on the Future of Europe sent to the CEC constituency in June 2016 with an invitation to react raised a considerable interest. Up to May 2017 CEC received 19 official reactions from CEC Member Churches, National Councils of Churches and Partner Organisations. Most of them have been the results of an intensive consultation process within the replying church, council of churches, or partner organisation. Together with the mostly appreciative comments on the CEC initiative to launch the discussion, a number of constructive proposals, in some cases critical comments either on the overall theme and the scope of the letter, or to some specific issues addressed in the letter have been received.

Reactions have been received from:

- Churches: Bund der evangelischen freikirchen in Deutschland, Protestant Church in the Netherlands, Methodist Church in Ireland, Church of Norway, Church of Ireland, Evangelische Landeskirche in Baden, United Protestant Church in Belgium, Church of England – Council for Christian Unity, Reformed protestant Church Luxemburg, Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, Salvation Army, ELCD Denmark, Outcomes of the EKD Synod, Silesian church AC in Czech republic
- Council of Churches: Council of Churches in the Netherlands, Churches in Ireland
- Partner organisations: Faith in Europe, Church and Peace, Quakers

CEC is committed to keep the discussion process on the Future of Europe as an open, transparent and participatory activity. All received reactions are displayed on the specific section of the CEC website <http://www.ceceurope.org/open-letter/>.

1. Richness, variety and conflicting proposals

Received letters reflect richness and variety of different experiences of churches, different theological accents in their work, as well as the variety of in socio-political realities churches are living across the continent. Richness and variety can be demonstrated in pairing of some specific, sometimes even conflicting proposals, for example:

- Values are important; the most valuable part of the CEC letter
- CEC should focus on shared values in Europe in general
- There is the need to intensify cooperation with secular partners
- The need to highlight the importance and relevance of Charta Oecumenica
- The European project is an important theme for the churches
- Diversity in the use of theological language, and theological accents
- Notion of European values have been eroded and is empty. Is the discussion on values helpful at all?
- To focus specifically on Christian values and the need to protect, or 'regain' them
- There is an important role for the churches in re-Christianising Europe
- What is the value of Charta Oecumenica 17 years after its adoption? There is a need to look much more in forward.
- There is a very limited role for the churches in a dialogue on political matters

2. Mapping of presented concerns

Summarizing and analysing received texts allows to identify 4 major clusters of concerns. An overall umbrella theme on the contribution of churches to the Future of Europe is approached through highlighting in particular the following issues:

- Europe and the relationship to the EU. This includes as well churches' engagement in public space and their role in a dialogue with politics
- Values
- Theology
- Wishes and expectations towards the Conference of European Churches including its' 15th Assembly

The following paragraphs (3 – 6) summarize and structure arguments presented in received responses, as they have been clustered to above mentioned 4 themes.

3. The role of churches in public discourse on Europe and the relationship to the EU

In addressing the relationship between Europe and the EU, received responses required more specific language and careful distinguishing between Europe and the EU. It was highlighted in particular:

- The need to differentiate between the specific role of the churches in the EU and in Europe (Church of Norway)
- A vision for Europe must go beyond the boundaries of the European Union (Church of England)
- So long as CEC insists on an approach which begins by focusing on the EU, there is bound to be a certain awkwardness as to how churches in the UK can enter into the conversation. (CoE)

3.1. Vision of Europe, Vision of the EU

In addressing the concerns related to Europe and being more specific on the vision of Europe and the EU, highlighted were in particular:

- The need to emphasize with growing urgency that the EU needs to be a community of shared values. (Protestant Church in Belgium, Salvation Army, Church and Peace)
- Churches should express positive appreciation of achievements and support of the EU integration process. (Evangelical Church in Baden)
- The need to find a balance between unity and diversity; between being strong collectively and the wish for independence. In this respect the principle of subsidiarity is crucial. (FEPS)
- An emphasis on a renewed sense of community. A positive vision for Europe needs to have a renewal of community at its heart, based on the restoration of values as equality, freedom, integrity, justice and peace. (Salvation Army)
- The need to re-examine the European vision and to breathe new life into our hopes for a shared future to which the church can contribute by realising the outworking of koinonia and diaconia. (Church of Ireland)
- One sided emphasis of European policies being almost exclusively economic is a problem. If the EU is a community of shared values, it should broaden its policies, including social and sustainable goals. (Council of Churches in the Netherlands, Quakers)
- The EU's current difficulties have been particularly caused by too readily addressing the demands of Mammon and insufficiently heeding the visions and values of the 'European Movement's' original architects. (Faith in Europe)
- Analysis needs to be undertaken by Churches as to why the EU is losing its appeal to the peoples of Europe and proposals to address the issues raised by such analysis brought forward. The concept of a 'Social Europe' needs to be reinvigorated. (The Methodist Church in Ireland)

3.2. Growing Euroscepticism

- There is a need for space for Euroscepticism. While maintaining EU vision, we need to work alongside the EU scepticism in finding appropriate responses. (Ev.Luth Church of Denmark, EKD, Council of Churches in the Netherlands, Churches in Ireland)

3.3. The voice of Central and Eastern Europe

- In the considerations offered by the CEC letter an analysis of specific challenges coming out of post-communist countries into the EU has to be included. (FEPS, ELC of Denmark)

3.4. Migration / refugees

Responses outlined mixed reactions regarding the issue of migration and refugees:

- Migration is the major challenge to be addressed (Church of Norway)
- The phenomenon of migration needs more precise differentiation. Solidarity with refugees is crucial, the CEC Assembly should serve as a platform for sharing experiences of solidarity (Evangelical Church in Baden)
- Refugees – this is a question of justice, which needs a European solution. (EKD)
- Migration in society causes mixed responses and opens dilemmas in society (Church of Ireland)
- Migration should not be treated as the major problem. Order of priorities of 5 subthemes outlined in the CEC letter should be: economic developments, democratic deficit, Euroscepticism, violent conflicts, migration (FEPS)
- Together with Christian duty to welcome refugees should be mentioned the instance of abuse of hospitality and discuss the question of integration of migrants and refugees, as well as to raise the issue of reciprocity and an approach to refugees and to other religions in Islamic countries. (Silesian Evangelical Church in Czech republic)

3.5. Churches and politics

- The major challenge in considering the situation in Europe and its' future is the reduced impact of the states to the wellbeing of citizens. Most of the reaction expressed an agreement with the analyses offered in the CEC letter. The substance of the problem of the difficulties European societies are increasingly facing is 'a growing political and economic egoism.' (Protestant church in Luxemburg)

4. Values

A number of responses appreciated that the CEC letter outlines the perspective of shared values, dialogue about churches in Europe on the content of values (Council of Churches in the Netherlands, Churches in Ireland, Methodist Church in Ireland). Some others required that the role of the churches in this discussion must be even more visible and more focused, highlighting that churches need to be more challenging and be able to raise open and difficult questions. (Ev.Luth Church of Denmark, EKD). Under the heading of values some specific concerns have been pointed out, as follows:

4.1. Normativity of values

- Of course it is important to be aware of the roots of Europe, its source and its values. For many people however, these sources are not clear anymore. (Protestant Church in the Netherlands)
- The notion of European values has been eroded, needs more clarification. (Ev.Luth Church of Denmark)
- Values although being important, have become emptied of content and in some respect even used in a false way. We need to be more concrete in the value discourse and relate values with concrete and visible action. Values must be always newly rediscovered and filled with content. (Evangelical Church in Baden)
- Arguments based on values is a trap and a misguided idea that only lead to empty rhetoric and pious hopes (FEPS)
- The question is what 'value' do we put on values, what priority have they in daily lives? Attention needs to be given to the dynamics and changing perspectives on values in modern society. (FEPS)
- Why common values are becoming weaker? (Church of England)
- The division between stated aims (proclamation of values) and their implementation. (Protestant Church in Luxemburg) has to be addressed
- The vitally important questions about how churches speak distinctively about values and virtues in a pluralist society appear unexamined. (Church of England)
- Values without rights and duties have little value at all. (FEPS)

4.2. Christians speaking about values in European context

- Important questions which has to be raised are:
 - What values would churches wish to see reflected in European relations?
 - The theme belonging
 - How we treat each other (Churches in Ireland)
- Europe wants to be a communion of values, but it can hardly fulfil that role, because of the focus on the economic aspects of society. In this respect we would appreciate a more elaborated view on the contribution of the churches, e.g. in the field of diaconal work. (Protestant Church in the Netherlands)
- The most important value is faith in God. Clear reverence towards God as well the posture of humbleness could be stressed as an uniting element of people in the EU. The document does not mention looking for God and a return to Christianity as the most important Christian values. (Silesian Evangelical Church in Czech republic)
- The role of churches in the EU is to support family. (Silesian Evangelical Church in Czech republic)
- In a discourse on values has to be specified, what is the specific Christian contribution? (Church of Norway)
- We need a discussion on what common values might mean with and an understanding of values as a dynamic concept, need of constant revisiting
- Tensions between desires to maintain cultural identity and embracing diversity (Church of Ireland)
- Christian values do not have the status of absolute, basic and normative values, they are not presented even by Christians steadfastly and consequently – therefore church statements are not taken seriously in a public space. (Protestant Church in Luxemburg)
- On the bases of self-reflection churches should focus their effort on critical reflection of individualism, hedonism and materialism and promotion of altruism, self-restraint, modesty and other moral values. (Silesian Evangelical Church in Czech republic)
- CEC should confront wide spread uncritical and borderless benevolence and charitableness, which shores sexual minorities, immigrants and other than Christian religions. (Silesian Evangelical Church in Czech republic)
- There is the need to highlight the critique of tolerance which functions as relativistic totalitarianism against Christians. (Silesian Evangelical Church in Czech republic)

5. Theology

5.1. Diakonia & Koinonia

- Strong support for upholding koinonia and diakonia as core values for the churches (Church of Norway)
- Welcome the challenge on how koinonia and diakonia can make new realities in the way we live out the gospel in society (Church of Ireland)
- Diakonia and koinonia – there has to be an invitation for concrete action. Need to use in a positive way examples of churches' action which achieve positive results. (Evangelical Church in Baden)
- Diakonia – used in the sense that has neither institutional nor theological purchase for the British churches. (Church of England)

5.2. How do we use theology and theological language?

- Weakness of the document is the lack of a clear theological framework. (Churches in Ireland)
- The document does not mention God and only marginally speaks about Jesus Christ. Cross and resurrection are not mentioned at all. (Silesian Evangelical Church in Czech republic)
- Christ or gospel are mentioned only once..... The letter does not sufficiently elaborate mission and witness. (Church of England)
- Europe should be called to repentance for abandoning and disowning Christian faith. (Silesian Evangelical Church in Czech republic)
- Need to involve more critical and open theological perspective. (Ev.Luth Church of Denmark)

6. Conference of European Churches including the 15th Assembly

6.1. Expectations from CEC

- CEC should create a space for an open exchange and sharing among the churches, which cannot be prevented by church authorities – this is the necessary precondition if Churches / Christians want to speak to the public in a convincing way (Protestant Church in Luxemburg)
- Challenges to the churches and CEC: Engagement with society and life together as God's people. (Salvation Army)
- Churches, should commit to the following: (The Methodist Church in Ireland)
 - A renewal of prayer for Europe and all its peoples and for EU in public worship
 - A planned, systematic and organised programme of hospitality to welcome, house, support, train and integrate refugees and migrants
 - Ongoing dialogue with other Churches and with other civil society partners at national and European levels to raise awareness of the many economic, social, political and environmental issues impacting on all Europeans
 - Undertake, together, to research, analyse and study the key issues facing Europe so that Churches might make informed and timely contributions to the resolution of these issues
- It is to be hoped that CEC will provide a forum within which Christians of different traditions, in dialogue with those of other faiths and none (Faith in Europe)
- Important is to involve youth in the discussion. (Churches in Ireland)
- Need to avoid an impression that CEC is an EU institution; CEC cannot take for granted that all its members would share positions on some EU related policies. (Churches in Ireland)
- CEC is in its ivory tower protecting the religious values in a context of selfishness, crisis, short term thinking, and so on. (Protestant Church in the Netherlands)

6.2. Specific wishes related to the upcoming Assembly

- Preparation for the Assembly will require a much clearer analyses of the political, social and cultural situation and the scope for the churches to have a significant impact on that. (Church of England)
- Language of crises, crossroads etc. needs to be replaced by language of hope. Consideration should be given to how this might be achieved through the work the Assembly. (Churches in Ireland)
- Political issues should not be allowed to dominate the agenda and eclipse other important areas of work such as pastoral care and mission. CEC is about relating churches to each other, not churches to other institutions. (Churches in Ireland)

7. Other concerns

- There is the need to consider negative Impacts of Brexit on reconciliation and peace efforts. Brexit gives rise to great anxiety and to great danger in respect of a return to strife on the island of Ireland. EU membership was a key element in the context of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and the EU has been a very important supporter of the peace process. Ireland requires to be given Special Region status in any new relationships between the UK and EU. (Church of Ireland, The Methodist Church in Ireland)
- Protection of minorities is an item missing in the letter. There is the request to raise it (Evangelical Church in Baden)
- Whatever serious efforts to address the future of Europe will need to take into account new challenges, as e.g. digitalisation, role of social media, democratic fatigue, questioning of old ideals, post-politics, post-facticity, etc. (FEPS)
- In what sense is the Charta Oecumenical important today as a reference document for churches work? What is the value of this document 17 years after its creation? What is the foundation for our common work? (FEPS)