**The Role of Religion in Conflict, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation**

A study document of the Conference of European Churches’ Thematic Reference Group on Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making His appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

**Introduction**

The present text is a study document of the Conference of European Churches’ Thematic Reference Group on Peacebuilding and Reconciliation. The background conversations of this document are rooted in the biblical notions of *martyria*, *koinonia*, *diaconia*, and *leitourgia* that capture the essence of the mission of the Church in and for the world. These notions are reflected in the findings of the Consultation process on the Future of Europe that are included in the report of the Consultation process which is part of the ‘Report from Budapest to Novi Sad 2018.’

**1.1. Reconciliation as participation in God’s mission**

Jesus declared the peacemakers the children of God. The Churches, therefore, are called to witness and realise peace (*shalom*) that is more than mere absence of armed conflict. Peace is a gift of God (Jn. 14:27) and at the same time a vocation of Christian life as it is experienced in Christ. The stewardship of Christians in peacekeeping and peacemaking is a sign of grace in our world, as peace, love, kindness, joy, faithfulness are the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). In this perspective, a direct and inseparable link between peace, diaconical love and justice has been established in Christ. In the vision of St Paul reconciliation and peacebuilding are a participation in God’s mission in and for the world. Even if this mission is challenging and sacrifice-demanding the faithful will always have everlasting comfort and good hope through grace in every good work and word (2 Thess. 2:17). In today’s world, as churches participate in civil society, they are engaged with public issues, such as politics, international affairs, economics, globalization, environmental healing and human flourishing.

Reconciliation and peace, therefore, are not private and individualistic pursuits. The witness to and the practice of peace is public and peace witness is public theology in action. Reconciliation entails building relationships and requires the change and transformation of social structures. It can only be achieved with justice, truth, forgiveness and healing of memories. Religion and the Christian faith have played historically a crucial role in bringing reconciliation, making peace, fostering resilience of local communities, and strengthening social cohesion. However, religions, including Christian communities, have sometime worked in other ways.

As responsible actors in civil society the Churches do their theology and peacebuilding in the public arena. This is the living out of public theology and being responsible actors in civil society and in the international order. The Christian churches accept their share of
responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of their adherents and for the common good and wellbeing of society. They have a critical voice when necessary, envisioning an alternative world when required, and they articulate a hope-filled voice. They are local, European and global in their engagement.

The present document is exploring the role of Christian faith promoting reconciliation and peace in Europe. It builds upon the long history of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) in promoting peace initiatives and provides a theological foundation of concrete actions that can strengthen peace in Europe today. The document will facilitate conversations during the workshops organized by the CEC Thematic Reference Group on Peacebuilding and Reconciliation. It is primarily addressed to delegates, advisors and other participants at the 2018 Novi Sad General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches. It is an exploration of the ministry of reconciliation and a commitment of European churches to peacemaking and peacebuilding in light of the ongoing work of the Thematic Reference Group; it is a call to churches, religious communities and people of good will to join the Conference of European Churches in the journey of peace.

In the present document, the Pauline vision of reconciliation, the biblical and theological concept of the reign of God, as well as the Church’s experience in peace recorded in the patristic writings, serve as the theological underpinning of the work of churches in witnessing peace in their daily life and promoting justice and hospitality for a sustainable future of Europe.

1.2. Our legacy
The experience of two World Wars led churches in Europe to take responsibility for the conflicts of the past and commit to the building of Europe anew. The historically significant Charta Ecumenica signed in 2001 highlights Christian faith as the foundation for “a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail.” “The readiness to forgive,” and compassion are among the values that are emphasised. Church leaders at the time were perceptive enough to draw attention to “the danger of Europe developing into an integrated West and a disintegrated East,” and warned against “the North-South divide within Europe,” while they stressed the need to “avoid Eurocentricity and heighten Europe's sense of responsibility for the whole of humanity, particularly for the poor all over the world.”

Central to the spirit of Charta Ecumenica is the reconciliation of people and cultures. Diversity of regional, national, cultural and religious traditions are seen as enrichment for Europe. The common endeavours of Churches “are devoted to evaluating, and helping to resolve, political and social issues in the spirit of the Gospel.” Churches affirm the value of “person and dignity of every individual as made in the image of God” and “defend the absolutely equal value of all human beings.” They commit to “promoting the process of democratisation in Europe,” to developing “structures of peace, based on the non-violent resolution of conflicts.” They “condemn any form of violence against the human person, particularly against women and children” and remind that “reconciliation involves promoting social justice within and among all peoples.” Central to this is bridging “the gap between

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1 Charta Ecumenica, III, 7, 9.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Charta Ecumenica, III, 8, 10.
rich and poor and overcoming unemployment” and also providing “migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers a humane reception in Europe.”

These affirmations and commitments of the churches in Europe have been clearly expressed in concrete actions. The Conference of European Churches has a longstanding experience as an instrument of peacebuilding and reconciliation in Europe: it served as bridge-builder between East and West after World War II; has been involved in the Organisation for Security and Co-operation Europe (OSCE); provided early warning and the possibility of dialogue in times of war and conflict in Ireland, Cyprus, and post-Yugoslavia, especially Kosovo; undertook the ‘Healing of Memories’ project in South-East Europe together with the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE); made different interventions of/with religious leaders, and also at the grass-root level, as well as together with ecumenical partners such as the World Council of Churches.

While as Christians we commit to the spirit of Charta Óecumenica, we recognise the need for continuous dialogue, peacemaking and reconciliation, as we recall that the guidelines were signed four months before the attacks of 9/11, which brought significant changes worldwide. Although international bodies were established to face the atrocities of war, genocide and armed conflicts, and a big part of Europe has experienced peaceful development over the last decades, there are problems arising in an increasingly globalised world: international crime and terrorism, as well as climate change and pollution, crisis of the economic system, resurgence of nationalism and more. In a time when violent extremism and collective antagonism threaten our common future, Christians are called to follow the path of Christ to be peace-keepers and peace-makers.

1.3. Metanoia in the world
In order to be peace-makers, Christians are continually challenged by the call to metanoia. The long history of Christianity includes historical manifestations of all kind. In some cases, the Christian communities offered to the world a true witnessing of Christian life, whereas in other cases Christians failed to distance their communities from acts of injustice and abuse. Metanoia is needed for all cases when Christians tolerated or took the side of imperialism, nationalism, militarism, racism, anti-Semitism, economic and other oppressions.

The biblical texts reflect two meanings of metanoia. The first is drawn from the Old Testament and means ‘to return.’ It is the word that comes out of the Hebrew experience of Exile in Babylon in the 6th century BC. To repent was to return home, which was both to the homeland and God. The second one is connected with the gospel of Mark that begins with announcing the purpose and mission of Jesus: “the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk. 1:15). The echoes of the Old Testament are still there: return from exile, return to God, and the call to repent in both Testaments has among others a political connotation. Repentance takes place in the real world of politics, domination systems and ambiguous social realities. Metanoia is core to the reign of God. In the context of the early church communities, the Christian way of living was introduced

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5 Ibid.
as a radical alternative to the politically, economically and militarily oppressive kingdom or empire of Caesar.

Living in a specific cultural, social and political context, we have enculturated minds shaped by values that may not lead to wholeness, peace and wellbeing. Metanoia, which at root means ‘to go beyond the mind that we have,’ is about deep change, being shaped by a different mindset, a radically different set of values, and a turning around to journey towards God and God’s reign which leads to transformation. Metanoia is to turn to a new way of life; this is a life of self-giving love and active participation in the Holy Spirit’s ongoing work of liberation and reconciliation, having different models of power and ways of relating, just and peaceful ways of the practice of eco-human community. Working as stewards in the way of Jesus who “came not to be served but to serve” (Mk. 10:45) is the direction of the Church as it witnesses the continuous presence of the Triune God in history. In this perspective, repentance or metanoia is liberating and transformative praxis.

1.4. Basileia Tou Theou: A theological analysis based on the context of the biblical text

Core to the teaching and praxis of Jesus was the Basileia Tou Theou, the kingdom or reign of God. As highlighted above, the focus and purpose of the new community inaugurated with Jesus’ coming is challenging and clear. Its members are called to actively participate in God’s mission and be stewards in God’s actions in their time and place (1 Cor. 4:1-2). The reign of God is core and central to who and what they are. This shapes the dynamic and nature of God’s reign in the world.

When Jesus proclaimed that the reign had drawn near, He was not calling attention to Himself. He invited people to participate in God’s mission, whether the original audience was in Galilee or at the very heart of the empire in Rome. They were called to change their whole way of thinking and direction of life and share in God’s activity. But what was the nature of God’s action in the world? Jesus spoke of and pointed to the God of the reign. What kind of power and what kind of rule was this? God’s sovereignty (Malkuth) was resistant to imperial power, it was a liberating power with which life could flourish and grow. The reign of God was subversive of power as domination. Those who participate in it shape relationships through shared power rather than a dominating one. Sovereignty is not almightiness or absolute rule. There is a different kind of passion involved, not a passion for domination but a passion for justice.

The ancient Hebrews experienced a God of justice (Isa. 61:8). This justice was not punitive justice, a God of vengeance, but a God of social, restorative and distributive justice. The roots of this experience and understanding of God were in Exodus, a narrative of political, economic and religious liberation from the slavery of imperial Egypt. This was the foundational narrative that shaped the direction and praxis of the Hebrew way of life. The God at the heart of this liberation had a passion for justice and the Hebrew prophets made that the main theme of their searing critique of the external domination systems and the domination systems that developed within Israel and Judah. God’s justice was also at the heart of their radical social visions. This Kingship or reign of God was to be perceived in the particular events of the present time. God’s power and rule, God’s justice, were always socially contextualised.

The reign of already but not yet
When Jesus came to Galilee with all its oppression and suffering, proclaiming the reign of God, it was to proclaim that the reign of God was near or present. Jesus had made it clear through His teaching and life practice that something of God’s reign was present. Jesus told His friends to pray for the reign to come. The reign of God was already but not yet. But the reign of God was only present as the coming reign. It was not invisible but something that people could see and recognise. Martin Luther translated the Greek as Herbeigekommen, ‘has come close.’ But how present, near and close was the reign, and was it the power and rule of God in all its completeness? In history God’s power and rule are present where liberation from oppressive systems occur, where justice is done and peace is even partially realised. Where active non-violence breaks the cycle of violence, there God’s reign is present.

Theology describes this as the eschatological dimension, the future yet to be, but already glimpsed through the present reign of God, God’s alternative, active power and rule in history. “It is what life would be like on earth if God were King and the rulers of this world were not.” The eschatological dimension shapes our participation in the reign of God now inspiring and motivating to realise something of God’s future in the present. The eschatological vision drives us into deeper participation in our contextualised historical now.

A-Word-made-flesh Christology does not allow Christians to turn the reign of God into something other-worldly, or reduce it to a purely spiritual inner kingdom. The tension between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ does not allow to identify the reign of God with any state, super-power, national cause, economic system, or any human social construction, not even the imperium Christianum. The reign of God does not equate with any utopian vision or with a perceived golden age in the past or a still longed for golden age. The reign of God is ultimate, all else is penultimate at best, at worst they are self-constructed idols, or stand-in gods.

When Jesus came into historical Galilee and proclaimed God’s alternative, subversive and liberating reign, He summoned those who heard Him to metanoia, a change in the way of thinking and a new direction for living and praxis. Metanoia, not once but often, becomes the pathway for active participation in the reign of God in the world with all its historical struggle and injustice.

Biblical and Theological reflections on the praxis of the Reign of God
What Jesus meant by the reign of God has not always been easy to grasp. The three synoptic Gospels have Jesus begin His life's work with the proclamation of the reign of God. It is His core vision and master metaphor, and the driving force of all His teaching and activity. Life, teaching, death and resurrection are framed by the reign of God. (Mk. 1:14-15, Mt. 4:17, Lk. 4:16-19, 21, 43.) The faith community is shaped by the reign of God and is an active participant in its values, ethics and praxis. The biblical story of faith is the story of a minority community struggling to live faithfully in the dominating presence of oppressive and de-humanising systems.

‘Reign’ is also the Greek word for empire. The synoptics are using language in a subversive way, having Jesus proclaim a subversive and radically alternative empire. Proclaiming the empire or reign of God was a public statement that the empire did not determine truth or

7 Borg, p. 132.
8 Moltmann, p. 98.
reality, nor did it shape ethics and values. It was not normative. There were subversive values and ethics involved, a different norm, an alternative reality, an upside down empire or reign. The praxis of the reign of God in every age begins from that and we are invited to join. Ultimately the reign is God’s and we are stewards with God. The stories of Jesus in the parables show that human action is implicated in God’s reign.

John 18:36 portrays Pilate, the Roman Governor, interrogating Jesus about Jewish Kingship: “Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.’” Both in the gospel and the Book of Revelation Jesus is described as the lamb. The Johannine lamb is a contrast animal image to the vicious animals portrayed as embodiments of empire in the Book of Daniel. “My kingdom is not of this world” is no other-worldly claim. It is very much this world but it is in subversive contrast to the Roman kingdom represented by Pilate. If the lamb’s reign were like the Roman one, then the followers of Jesus would put up an armed fight to release him. But this is a peaceful reign, non-violent and just, the alternative to the Roman imperial power.

For Paul the reign is “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). The Roman community was bedevilled by superiority claims, boasting and prejudices. The reign of God made the cause of their divisions pale into insignificance. Right relations and peace are clear and joy is a reference to the Isaianic vision of the ultimate reconciliation of all things (Isa. 11:6-9; 25:6-8). It is an eschatological vision, something of which can be realised in the present. They are, therefore, to welcome each other as equals, a social vision of equality that requires the practice of justice.

Paul also draws again on the Isaianic tradition quoting Isaiah 11:10 in Romans 15:12. Viewed through the lens of the resurrection, Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed by God, and if that is so, then for Paul the Messiah is also Lord. And this is where Paul is criticising the domination system. The direct challenge is to the lordship of Caesar, which is both political and religious. Caesar demanded, not just taxes, but worship and sacrifices as an act of ‘secular’ loyalty. Caesar was divine, the supreme divinity in the Roman world and he would give the world justice and peace. The empire had its religious legitimacy and sacred essence. Caesar was Lord and Saviour. In this concrete situation of imperial power and religion, Paul will proclaim Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Jesus is Lord, not Caesar. The Barmen declaration made the same proclamation in 1934 in Germany: Jesus is Lord, not the Führer.9

1.5. Early Church’s peace tradition

As the patristic tradition is gospel-rooted, the overall socio-ethical teaching of the fathers and mothers of the Church underlines the refusal to accept violence as inevitable and focuses on the responsibility to work for the wellbeing of humankind and the transformation of the world. Christian men and women of the early Church are honoured and remembered today for their witness to reconciliation and the practice of peace. They exhorted the Christian communities through orations, letters, commentaries, and pastoral guidance, and most importantly through their own life to foster a culture that affirms a peaceful life, solidarity, meekness and virtues of peacemaking. War as a social reality has never been absent from the world and there have been historical moments for which Christians are still called to repentance. Nevertheless, the non-violent and reconciling Christian ethos has

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always been recognized as a sign of holiness and authentic Christian life. As it is written: 
“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21).

Peace is both a gift of God and a call. God bestows peace and humans are called to become messengers and servants of justice and peace. The praise of peaceful disposition and condemnation of war are uplifted in patristic literature:

Peace is indeed the greatest of the things which give joy; and this He [God] wishes each of us to have in such measure as to keep it not only for one’s self but also to be able to dispense from the overflow of one’s abundance to others. For He says: “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Now a peacemaker is a person who gives peace to another. But, one cannot give to another what one does not possess. So, the Lord wants first that you be filled with the blessing of peace, and then communicate it to those who have need of it.10

God is not a God of war and fighting. Make war and fighting cease, both that which is against Him, and that which is against your neighbour. Be at peace with all men, consider with what character God saves you. [...] If we are fighting and buffeting, we become far off from God: for enmities are produced by conflict, and from enmity springs remembrance of evil.11

The early Church paradigm sheds light onto the most authentic principles of Christian ethos that form the backbone of Christian communities over the centuries: refusal to join the agents of violence and devastation, advocacy of a just peace for all and active synergy to humanise the actual living conditions for all and especially for people in need. A Christian proclamation facing the challenge of violence in today’s world can only be of prophetic character, a choice that overcomes the options of conflict and division in order to serve as a bridge of reconciliation.

Looking back at the experiences lived by the Church throughout history, what does active participation in God’s mission look like? The faith community or church performs in the world. There is a lifestyle of service, humility and not imperial arrogance or a violent use of power. It is a praxis of justice seeking, giving up, sacrificing the false values of wealth, status seeking and power over others and nature. The lifestyle is of openness, inclusion, hospitality and active non-violence. It is the faith community for others, for the world and for human

11 St. John Chrysostom, On Philippians, Homily 14, cf. The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Statues: Or, To the People of Antioch, Homily 20: “Has your neighbor wronged and grieved you, and involved you in a thousand vengeances on your own part, lest you do despite to your Lord! Yield the matter to God, and He will dispose of it much better than you can desire. To you He has given charge simply to pray for the injurer; but how to deal with him, He has ordered you to leave to Himself. Never can you so avenge yourself, as He is prepared to avenge you, if you give place to Him alone, and do not utter imprecations on him who has aggrieved you; but suffer God to be sole arbiter of the sentence. For although we may pardon those who have aggrieved us, although we may be reconciled, although we may pray for them, yet God does not pardon, unless they themselves are converted, and become better.” The inclusiveness of a paradigm that combines the teaching and the practicing of Christian ethos is illustrated in an exemplary way by St. Basil the Great. His words may serve as a witness of a Christian peace-building stance: For the sake of this peace, therefore, I have determined to neglect no effort whatever, not to omit anything as too humble to say or do, not to take into account the length of any journey, and not to shrink before any irksome thing, if so I may obtain the rewards of peace-making. And if anyone follows us who are leading the way in this matter, that is excellent, and my prayer is fulfilled. St. Basil the Great, Letter 97.
and eco-flourishing. The Church foretastes the reign of God in the life of the world. It is ethical praxis and ethical praxis is action and participation in God's reign.

2.1. Strengthening the Churches’ peacebuilding praxis: The Conference of European Churches as an instrument of peace

In times of tensions, fear of deterioration, and violence instrumentalised by populist movements as well as those who aim to strengthen the militarisation of security, churches in Europe and the Conference of European Churches as a major platform for ecumenical dialogue, have a crucial role to play. As the Charta Ecumenica noted in 2001, the plurality of religious and non-confessional beliefs and ways of life has always been a feature of European culture. Common responsibility for Europe is interrelated with dialogue between churches and other religions and world views. Increased migration has been opening up fresh approaches to interreligious relations and this entails possibilities of enrichment, responding appropriately to situations of conflict and building bridges of peace.

Interreligious dialogue and engagement for peace

We are part of a global common humanity. We share life with its happiness and worries, joys and struggles with people of different faiths, and no religion. We are sent by God to share and serve in a common society, as fellow citizens. We need to co-exist and speak and co-contribute to global concerns locally.12

In the light of the need to engage in an increasingly changing and complex context and build greater Christian confidence, the Conference of European Churches is called to build on resources already available and share them widely. A CEC study on theological reflections of churches on their relations with other faith communities in 2008 underlined among others two crucial points: “That the creaturely nature of human beings and their being in the image of God is the basis for respect a priori for all religious beliefs”13 and that Trinitarian theology “explains God’s action in relation to non-Christian religions as the action of the triune God.”14

Interreligious dialogue, therefore, is “grounded in the life and mission of the Triune God.”15

As Father, Son and Spirit, God the Holy Trinity lives in a pattern of interdependence, mutual giving and incessant dialogue in which we are invited and enabled to participate. In different ways, intra-Christian and interreligious dialogue both share in the Trinitarian dialogue. [...] 

In interreligious dialogue, our purpose is to enter further into the mystery of what God is doing in the lives of people of other religions [...] and so to come to a greater understanding

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13 On the way to a common theology of religions in Europe. Statement adopted by CEC Churches in Dialogue Commission at its fifth meeting in Pullach/Munich, Germany (25-27 June 2008), 1.
14 Ibid. 2.
and honouring of one another which will build peace and community, through the God-wards transformation of humanity and the whole creation.\textsuperscript{16}

Christian faith has a history of witness and proclamation among people of other or no faith. Participation in \textit{Missio Dei} implies the encounter with other religions. Christians witness to the good news in dialogue with others implies openness to the witness of those of other world religions and their experience of the Divine. Apart from the theological and spiritual aspect, interreligious dialogue has a socio-economic aspect as well. It is dialogue on the level of ethics, as it concerns justice, compassion, mercy, love, peace, family, human rights, diversity, right relationships, and equality. It is also a dialogue of action involving peacemaking and peacebuilding, reconciliation of communities, advocacy for just economics, strategies for the healing of creation, strategies for overcoming war and violence, and strategies of peace.

When war and violence destroy human life and leave legacies of poverty, suffering and the destruction of values which extend for generations, there is an imperative for dialogue for peaceful coexistence. Militarisation of security in Europe, military consumerism and weaponry impel Christians to engage in dialogue with world religions for peace. In light of these, the Conference of European Churches is called upon to make this area of work a significant one during the next five years.

\textbf{Concrete action}

The reign of God as articulated by the book of Isaiah, the Beatitudes and the Lord’s prayer, also by John and Paul, is the basis and model for people of faith actively participating in God’s mission in and for the world. Such an ethical praxis is active involvement in the reign that is here and now and is still to be.

For the Member Churches of the Conference of European Churches this could be translated into concrete action and mean that they:

- continuously reflect on liturgy and worship and ensure that rituals and symbols form the people of faith in the vision and ethical praxis of the reign of God
- implement education and catechesis as empowerment towards moral and ethical formation for concrete praxis in the world
- engage as agents of liberation from poverty, hunger and social oppression

As a Thematic Reference Group we challenge ourselves and the CEC community in the public square to:

- witness in a non-violent and inclusive way in society
- be advocates and agents for social, restorative and distributive justice locally and globally
- be active in peacemaking initiatives and in processes of peacebuilding in collaboration with other religions
- challenge and overcome militarism, military consumerism and all forms of violence.

The mission of the Conference of European Churches is to spread the hope which is rooted in the gospel and to engage for peace and reconciliation. In practical terms, this means to:

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. 15.
• accept and proclaim diversity as an inherent part of our faith in the churches and between churches and others
• analyse and name stereotypes, which polarise and lead to fragmentation
• sharpen the theological reflection on just peace and non-violence as first resort, including discussions within the Member Churches and with the historical Peace churches
• link with the World Council of Churches’ processes of the ‘pilgrimage of justice and peace’ and ‘religion and violence’
• continue programmes for ‘Healing of Memories’ between confessions, churches, religious and ethnic communities.

With regard to peace within and beyond Europe, churches need to work for structures of peace, based on the non-violent resolution of conflicts. This means that the Conference of European Churches needs to:

• encourage the development of early warning systems by churches in potential conflict regions
• support churches and religious communities including trainings for non-violent methods and de-escalation in their educational programmes
• build a platform for exchange of information, competences, methods, and expertise at the European level
• express a clear commitment to dialogues and interventions towards the European Parliament, the European Commission, and NATO regarding peacebuilding instead of security management
• strengthen collaboration with OSCE and in public statements underline the role of peacebuilding
• join the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO).

The Conference of European Churches Peace Task Force
The Conference of European Churches and Member Churches are active participants in God’s mission in and for the world. As a concrete expression of this, a Peace Task Force will be developed to give active witness to God’s ministry of reconciliation. As a Peace Task Force its action will essentially be as mediators of peace in the wider European and local context. This mediation work will be through CEC and its Member Churches. The task will be threefold:

i. Responding to situations of Conflict
ii. Peacemaking
iii. Peacebuilding

The Peace Conference of 2019
In connection with the Peace Task Force, a significant Peace Conference is planned for 2019 with a twin focus on the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and the current global and European situation. The conference will:

• identify the current threats to peace in Europe and the world and articulate the challenges presented by the global experiences of the 21st century
• explore the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 in its centenary year, to identify its legacies and to learn some hard lessons from our European and global past
• reflect theologically and ethically on the past and contemporary world and identify a theological praxis that can enable CEC and its Member Churches to engage in transformation, healing and reconciliation
• develop appropriate resources for use by Member Churches and partners, so that there is greater recognition of our common Christian life in Europe of the 21st century.

As we envision our journey of peace and justice beyond the 2018 Novi Sad General Assembly, we humbly pray:

We turn to you, our God, you who want to gather all of us under your Protective wings. We pray Make us willing to work for peace. Help us to build peaceful and inclusive societies. Prompt the leaders of this world to put an end to corruption, misuse of power, Trafficking and torture. Transform the leaders of the organised crime. Put an end to rearmament and trade of weapons. Show us how as churches can promote a growing peace between humans From different groups. Praise be to you who bring the peace that we cannot create ourselves. Yours is the power and the glory. (Lk. 13:34).\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{17} SKR, Prayer related to the Sustainable Development Goals. no 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies, translated from Swedish by Björn Cedersjö.