

**Conference of European Churches
Governing Board
Holy Etchmiadzin - Armenia, 25-27 November 2015**

Statement

A Europe of peace and hospitality

The Governing Board of the Conference of European Churches met from 25 to 27 November in Holy Etchmiadzin (Armenia) for its second regular meeting of 2015. The meeting was hosted by the Armenian Apostolic Church. The board was deeply moved by the fate of the Armenian people, who this year commemorate the centennial of the Armenian genocide. It was in this context that the Governing Board of the Conference noted with deep concern the growing refugee crisis and the current responses to it. Those fleeing terrorism, conflict and seeking protection within European borders are increasingly met with hostility, suspicion, and even violence. While thousands of people arrive by boat and land fleeing from conflict and violence, calls to close borders and turn the persecuted away are growing louder. Even as children drown and trains filled with refugees are turned back, barbed wire is unfurled and border security is tightened. The Governing Board is concerned that the Soul of Europe is in danger of being undermined.

The Governing Board reiterates its conviction that all countries in Europe are called to protect those fleeing persecution and war. Europe's heritage of wealth, safety, and democracy is accompanied by a responsibility to welcome people in need of protection with dignity and respect. As we prepare anew for the coming of Christ in this world, we are reminded that our Lord was once a small child fleeing from the threat of death.

In the shadow of deadly attacks in Paris and military intervention in Brussels, it is too easy to surrender to a climate of hatred and fear. The churches of Europe must be a voice of peace and hospitality in these difficult times. We reject any attempt to turn Europe into a fortress and condemn all acts of violence, hostility, and exclusion toward refugees. The Governing Board is aware, however, that the refugee crisis poses enormous challenges to its membership in terms of their responsibilities concerning integration.

The Conference of European Churches is called to proclaim and live out the gospel, upholding a vision of Europe as a continent living at peace with itself and its neighbours, safeguarding life and the well-being of all humankind. As churches, moving towards closer fellowship and greater

unity, we are called to live out the biblical imperative to build bridges, to feed the hungry and welcome the stranger. It is this vision that inspires millions of Europeans to work for peace and offer Christian hospitality. This vision also draws many to our borders with hope for a better life within. In these darkened days, the words of Christ light our way, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, 27 November 2015