DOC ID	GEN_03
LANGUAGE	ENGLISH
ORIGINAL	English

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES
NOVI SAD 2018

Introduction to the formal proceedings of the General Assembly

The CEC General Assembly is the most representative body of the Conference of European Churches. It is also its highest decision and policy-making body. In order to facilitate the General Assembly's work and empower its delegates to deliberate and decide on the issues at hand, it is important to know and understand the rules that guide its procedures.

This preface aims at helping delegates and participants get to know how the CEC General Assembly functions. We hope that it will help you participate to the full in the business of the General Assembly, although this does not replace the formal documents which direct the General Assembly's work. These documents are:

- The Constitution of the Conference of European Churches (C);
- The Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly (RoP).

This preface provides a guide to relevant parts of those documents. From time to time it shows which parts of those documents deal with a particular point. The Constitution and the Rules of Procedure follow after this preface.

Why does CEC hold a General Assembly?

According to Belgian law, CEC must hold a General Assembly once a year, because it is obligatory that the Member Churches approve the budgets and accounts and grant discharge to the Governing Board annually. However, for these formal procedures relating to the Conference's finances it is neither necessary nor logistically feasible to bring together almost 200 delegates for a physical meeting. These decisions are taken in a 'written procedure'. The process is currently under review, because it did not work out well in the first years. But the general principle will be maintained also in the future.

More important to the actual work of CEC are what is now called the 'physical General Assemblies'. Here, the delegations of the Member Churches, representatives of the Organisations in Partnership, of National Councils of Churches and observers, advisors etc. gather to give CEC a visible shape and its Members' and wider constituency a voice to be heard throughout Europe.

CEC holds such a physical General Assembly at least once every five years. It reviews CEC's work over the preceding five years and decides on its strategic objectives for the next period. This includes general guidelines on the topics CEC should address and also the way in which this should be done. It elects a new Governing Board to oversee and steer the work of the General Secretariat during the next five years. It discusses a theme

and draws up a financial plan for the period until the next ordinary General Assembly. It may also amend the Constitution.

Who will you meet at the General Assembly?

Member churches of CEC have each been invited to send delegates to the General Assembly. The number of delegates appointed by each member church depends on the size of the church. The delegates have the right to speak and only they have the right to vote (RoP B.4.1(a)). Any member of the outgoing Governing Board who is not a delegate of his or her church may also attend with the right to speak and table motions, but without the right to vote (RoP B.4.1(c)).

CEC also invites Organisations in Partnership and National Councils of Churches to send representatives to the General Assembly. Such representatives and other observers do not have the right to vote. They may, however, speak as advisors or observers if they have been originally invited by the Governing Board (RoP B.4.1 (f)-(h) and authorized to do so by the General Assembly Moderator (RoP B.4.4).

The CEC staff will be present without the right to speak or vote. They are, however, sometimes asked by the Moderator to contribute to the discussions in plenary.

A number of young people help the General Assembly as stewards. It is important that the General Assembly respects that stewards have already been assigned to specific tasks in order to help the General Assembly run smoothly. Volunteers and members of the Local Committee will also be present in the General Assembly. In addition to the important tasks they carry out, the presence of stewards and volunteers adds an important dimension to the composition and life of the General Assembly.

Who runs the General Assembly?

The General Assembly elects its Moderators. The President will, on behalf of the Governing Board, propose candidates as Moderator and two Vice-Moderators (RoP B.5.7). The persons proposed, from the three Church-families, will have been intensively briefed in the Rules of Procedure and the set-up and thematic focuses of the General Assembly, but should – as a rule – not be delegates themselves, so as to be impartial in their role.

The Moderator presides over the General Assembly, ensuring that debates are conducted fairly, that speakers keep to the rules of debate and observe time limits on speeches. He or she also decides which participants will be called to speak and in what order (RoP B.6.2). The Moderator may ask one of the Vice-Moderators to preside during a particular session and must do so if he or she wishes to table a motion or take part in the debate (RoP B.6.1 and B.6.4).

A Steering Committee helps the Moderator in the conduct of the General Assembly. Its membership is laid down in the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly.

Getting started

At the beginning of the General Assembly the chair is taken by the President of CEC who conducts the General Assembly until the Moderators and Vice-Moderators have been elected. He proposes the names of the tellers who count the votes, as well as two legal advisors who will ensure that all relevant legal provisions are respected. They are appointed by the General Assembly.

Before this, however, the President has to determine whether the General Assembly has been properly convened. The General Secretary, through the Assembly Coordinator, provides all the information necessary and equips all delegates with their voting cards.

After the tellers and legal advisors are appointed, the General Assembly moves to vote on the proposal for a Moderator and two Vice-Moderators put to it by the Governing Board. These will then take over the running of the General Assembly.

General Assembly Committees:

1. The **Nominations Committee** is made up of 10 members elected by of the General Assembly as well as the Chair of the Governing Board's Nominations Panel. It has an important task, as elections in the General Assembly need to take not only personal qualification, but also a set of different criteria into account. CEC aims at being representative of its Church families, its regions, majority and minority churches, men and women, lay and ordained, young people and those with many years of ecumenical experience. The Governing Board's Nominations Panel has worked on well balanced proposals for candidates in advance of the General Assembly and will hand its work to the General Assembly's Nominations Committee. The Nominations Committee is responsible for proposals for all the General Assembly Committees with the exception of the Steering Committee. The Nominations Committee has to be elected as soon as possible after the start of the General Assembly so that it can propose members of the General Assembly Committees in good time for them to start to work. Their main task is to bring forward proposals for the new President, Vice-Presidents and Governing Board (including, currently, so called Proxy Board Members, who should come from the same Church family and region) and report their findings to the General Assembly until elections. At the same time the Nominations Committee is elected, the General Assembly will determine the number of people on the other committees (as far as these are not already determined in the Rules of Procedure).

2. The **Strategy and Policy Committee** consists of the keynote-listeners appointed by the General Assembly and an equal number of delegates elected by the General Assembly on the proposal of the Nominations Committee. Its task is to discuss the reports of the Governing Board and General Secretary, evaluate the progress made in achieving the strategic objectives of the Conference, and make proposals for their development and the future work of the Conference in general.

3. The **Finance Committee** is composed of 10 delegates elected by the General Assembly on the proposal of the Nominations Committee together with members of the existing Budget Committee of the Governing Board. Its task is to discuss CEC's finances and to submit a draft financial plan to General Assembly.

4. The **Public Issues Committee** is composed of a number of members elected by the General Assembly on the proposal of the Nominations Committee. Its task is to draft and recommend resolutions and statements on particular issues to the General Assembly.

5. The **Message Committee** is composed of a number of members elected by the General Assembly on the proposal of the Nominations Committee. Its task is to draft and recommend an overall message from the General Assembly on the theme "The Future of Europe".

The General Assembly can establish other Committees.

The Steering Committee, Strategy and Policy Committee, Finance Committee and any other Committees which the General Assembly decides to establish, with the exception of the Nominations Committee, may invite individual advisors, observers or others who may speak at the General Assembly to attend their meetings as advisors. They may also ask the General Secretary to make staff members available to help them in their work.

Reports and debates

Reports will be presented by the Moderator or another member of the Committee. Usually, particularly in the case of the Strategy and Policy Committee, the Public Issues and Message Committee, a member of the Committee will present a draft of its report which

the General Assembly will discuss without voting formally. The Committee notes the comments made during the discussion and considers whether any changes should be made to the report. At this stage the Committee may consider it helpful if participants with the right to table motions write down their suggestions for additions, deletions or changes.

To pass on your messages / amendments to the respective committees, you have the possibility to email them at:

2018GAnominations@gmail.com

2018GAfinance@gmail.com

2018GApublicissues@gmail.com

2018GAstrategy@gmail.com

2018GAmessage@gmail.com

When the final version of a report is presented, delegates and non-delegate members of the Governing Board have the opportunity to propose amendments to the reports. They must write their amendments down in one of the General Assembly's official languages. These amendments are treated as motions and put to the vote after debate.

Proposing a motion

A motion may also be proposed by a delegate, a non-delegate member of the Governing Board or a non-delegate Moderator/Vice-Moderator as long as it relates to an item on the agenda. All motions and amendments to motions must be submitted in writing with the name and church affiliation of the mover. It must be seconded by at least two delegates.

The mover of a motion or amendment speaks to explain what has been moved. At the end of the debate the person who proposed the motion or amendment has the right to speak again. If the motion is to amend a report or if there is a proposal to amend a motion, the normal practice is for the Moderator to ask the representative of the Committee whose report is being amended or the proposer of the motion being amended to speak immediately before the proposer of the motion.

Right to speak, Motion for closure

The Moderator may announce a time limit on speeches. In this case an announcement that the allotted time is about to expire must be made one minute in advance. At any time, except when someone is speaking, a delegate may move that the debate on a motion or amendment be closed. A delegate requesting the floor to move the closure must raise two hands as if raising a point of order. The Moderator then decides when to allow this motion to be put to the vote, e.g. the Moderator may consider that there has not yet been sufficient debate and says that the motion will be put after a certain number of further speakers. The motion for closure is voted on without discussion. If it is supported by two thirds of the delegates, the motion under debate is immediately voted on without further discussion.

Points of order and procedure

If a delegate considers that the Rules of Procedure are not being respected, he or she can raise a point of order.

The Moderator rules, upon consultation with the Legal Advisors, on whether they are being respected. If the ruling is disputed by a Delegate, another Moderator or a non-delegate Member or the Governing Board, the General Assembly shall vote on whether the Rules of Procedure have been respected or not. A delegate may also raise a point of procedure and ask the Moderator to clarify the question under discussion.

In either case the delegate requesting the floor must raise two hands to show that he or she is raising such a point.

Voting

The delegates of the General Assembly are – upon registration – handed out three stacks of “voting material”:

1.) Three coloured, personalised voting cards
2.) Voting papers for secret ballots (which will have consecutive numbers printed on them, so that each delegate uses only the one voting paper made for this particular vote)
3.) Voting papers for elections. (For the decisions on individual candidates, the delegates will have to write the names down and either make their cross or not. Those candidates are elected that get a simple majority of the votes cast).

The personalised voting cards given to delegates are as follows: one for voting in favour of a motion (GREEN), one for voting against (RED) and one for abstention (WHITE). When a vote is to be taken, the Moderator asks delegates to raise the appropriate card. The tellers will count the votes.

There is no obligation for the votes to be counted if the result is obvious, unless a motion has to be carried by a particular majority. In this case, the voting figures will need to be recorded to show that the decision was in order.

Voting by secret ballot

Three or more delegates may ask for a secret ballot and such a request cannot be refused. The Rules of Procedure do provide, however, that for one procedure in elections, there must be an open vote (see below under Elections).

Questioning the result of a vote

Once the Moderator has announced the result of the vote, a delegate may call it into question. A delegate requesting the floor to call the result of a vote into question must raise two hands as if raising a point of order. The General Assembly then votes on whether the vote should be repeated and, if this is agreed, the vote is taken again.

Consensus mode

On certain issues, on which no decision of the GA is required legally, and which fall rather in the sphere of ethics or public theology, a consensus mode may be used instead of actual voting. In this mode, which is in more detail described in section B.11 of the RoP, the Moderators aim at establishing a consensus on the topic. This means – roughly – that there is a significant majority in favour, but those not in favour do not oppose a consensus to be declared, with the additional option of dissenting votums to be recorded in the minutes.

Elections

The Nominations Committee brings a list of proposals to the General Assembly for each election. The list contains as many names as are to be elected. Against each name is noted the confession and European region from which the candidate comes and whether the candidate is a leading church official, a parish minister or lay person, a man, woman or young person. This is to help the General Assembly decide whether there is, as far as possible, a balanced representation.

Proposing alternative candidates

At least ten delegates may propose alternative candidates. This must be done within 24 hours of the submission by the Nominations Committee of the list of candidates for the President, Vice-Presidents and Governing Board. In the case of other committees, the time limit is two hours.

Alternative candidates must be of the same denomination and come from the same region of Europe as the candidate challenged.

Delegates vote in an open vote (RoP B.12.12) whether each alternative candidate should replace the candidate on the list. Once the list has been finalised, delegates vote in a secret ballot for the list as a whole. If more than half the votes are affirmative, all the persons on the list are elected.

Voting for individual candidates

If the list as a whole does not obtain half the votes cast, a further secret ballot is held in which delegates place a single cross against the name of each candidate whom they support. Those candidates who obtain more than half the votes cast are elected.

The Nominations Committee must then bring a new list of candidates with different names to replace those not elected. The same procedure is followed as with the original list and this process is repeated until the Committee or Governing Board is complete.

Dr Patrick Roger Schnabel

Andreas Henriksen Aarflot