



United Methodist Church
Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

Working Group for Theology & Ordained Ministry

Comments to the Open Letter "What Future for Europe?"

What future for Europe? Reaffirming the European project as building a community of values – An open letter of CEC to churches and partner organizations in Europe and an invitation to dialogue and consultation

The Working Group (WG) appreciates the suggestion of the subject 'Europe' for further discussions in church and society. To deal with European values seems to be a good and adequate approach to the subject. The vision of a Europe in peace is in danger since people who experienced the developments during and after WW II and know about the necessity to work for peace are dying. Churches and especially the Methodist Church (European and even global connectionalism!) can make important contributions to political and social discussions about Europe. Churches, themselves pluralistic and diverse, are used to intercultural (and even interreligious) dialogue. The WG is in itself a good example of intercultural cooperation, and European Methodism knows additional examples (the Methodist e-Academy, international committees, etc.). Churches have theological and first hand practical expertise with contacts between different people (working with migrants and refugees). In some of the European countries, they exercise an important influence on politics.

From a Methodist perspective, we wholeheartedly agree with the emphasis on diaconia, since this was the beginning of Methodist presence in many places around the world. But the document could need some theological supplementation with an emphasis on holiness broadly understood, a social holiness based on God's call to humanity not only to be images of the divine (Gen 1:27) but consequently also to be stewards of the earth (Gen 1:28). Holiness could be understood as a theological grounding for any catalogue of values. It is seen here as an equivalent of righteousness that flows out of faithful stewardship of the gifts received from God.

In the current version of the letter, the emphasis seems to us to be too much on the problems with Europe and too little on the possibilities of a Christian contribution to peaceful coexistence in Europe, i.e. the hope to which we are called. The call to holiness implies that we as Christians are called to let ourselves be transformed according to the love of God and neighbor, which means participating in God's transforming mission in the world. Such participation is not a sectarian one, not a participation at the cost of others, but a belonging that recognizes the potential contributions

of diverse other constituencies to the common good, including the contributions of other religions.

It also needs to be embodied in political participation on different levels. Churches may contribute their experiences in several fields, e.g. the international and intercultural work with young people or the practice to speak about and live peace and reconciliation. In addition, churches can play a role in modelling repentance, facing one's own historical ambiguities and intentionally turning away from past mistakes (ex. Nationalism). Perhaps in terms of politics churches at times may speak more clearly than politicians may.

In terms of the lists of values we are in general agreement, but we would like to supplement "tolerance" with the term "recognition", since tolerance to us seems to be a transitional condition that needs to develop further into recognition and in the end to reconciliation (cf. acceptance of each other – Rom 15:7)

Some members of the WG see a lack of leadership or leaders and consequently a weakness in several areas of the EU (and the NATO). A comparable weakness can be seen in the churches that do not succeed to speak with one voice (not even in their home countries). The gap between political, social and cultural elites and the ordinary citizens of Europe finds its mirroring in the discrepancy between Christian leaders and intellectuals and on ordinary church members (who are more skeptical of the EU).

The WG proposes

- to mention the still existing conflict between east and west,
- to highlight voices from Orthodox Churches a bit more, including the Russian Orthodox Church
- to consider different economic conditions in different areas in Europe, not least the situation of European countries outside the EU,
- to consider one additional context for the values listed, namely small family units that need support and protection since it is there that the implementation of values has its starting point. European (and any other) societal cohesion starts with healthy family units,
- to discuss the reasons for migration,
- to be more concrete in articulating a vision for the future of Europe,
- to rephrase the second sentence under the heading "Violent Conflicts and Terrorist Attacks" in order to avoid the impression that the numbers of refugees and the amount of terrorist attacks are directly related to each other,
- to also mention the significance of public communication (and the increasing role of social media in this respect – cf. "fake news" etc.)
- not to understand the formulation "soul of Europe" in a religious way (cf. the statement of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches)