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Respected Moderator,
 Respected President and Vice-President of the Conference of European Churches
 Respected Secretary General of the Conference of European Churches,
 Your Eminences, Your Excellencies,
 Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is a great honour for me as general secretary of the World Council of Churches to greet you all, both on behalf of the global fellowship I represent as well as on my own behalf as a pastor of one of your member churches and as a participant in several CEC Assemblies and host to one of them (in Trondheim 2003). It is a real joy for me to be here and to convey these greetings to the 15th general assembly of the Conference of European Churches gathered in the historical city of Novi Sad, Serbia, at the invitation of the Serbian Orthodox Church and other Serbian church members of the Conference of European Churches and of the World Council of Churches.

“You shall be my witness” – the theme of this Assembly – which is inspired by Acts 1:8 brings our attention to the mission we have as Christians, namely to be witnesses of Jesus Christ on earth. We are all living these days in the Post-Pentecostal period, as both churches of western and eastern traditions celebrated recently the fest of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles in Jerusalem. As Jesus promised to his disciples before his Calvary, the Holy Spirit, called “the Counsellor” (John 16:7), came upon them in order to complete the economy of salvation of humankind. Living in this reality of the Holy Spirit as disciples of the Resurrected Christ, we have received the power of the Holy Spirit and therefore are called to be God`s witnesses “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). As Europeans, we are called to be God`s witnesses on our continent by preaching and living the Gospel. This means to find ways of sharing the Gospel together – announcing the coming Kingdom of God with its values of “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 14:17). In our time that means, amongst other tasks, welcoming those who were forced to leave their homes because of war, terror and violence, building together a just economic system, strengthening our resources in order to provide a solid and easily accessible education, creating an environment where discrimination of any kind really belongs to the past, sharing the peace of God with all human beings and with the whole of God`s creation. It is not time for division or polarisation, or for any exclusive unity. It is time for serious, honest and constructive contributions to the unity of the Church in faith and witness in ministry and mission, embracing one another as Christ has received us (Rom. 15:7). It is also particularly

relevant in Europe where there are so many new lines of division, and forces of polarization. The churches are called to be a counter-force, expressing our Christian heritage, our Christian attitudes, our Christian calling together. It is all about the love of Christ. We need to show what it means that the love of Christ moves us on (2 Cor. 5:14).

A general assembly of an ecumenical organization is not only the supreme authority where member churches are represented by their delegations, but also a good opportunity for celebration, evaluation and planning and visioning for the future. You are gathered here to celebrate and assess the good work done by the Conference of the European Churches for the European churches and beyond. You have moved the headquarters from Geneva, Switzerland to Brussels, Belgium. For the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches still remains the main partner for ecumenical cooperation in Europe. We share the same vision for unity and cooperation in Europe as well as the same challenges and opportunities faced by our European churches. In order to better respond to the needs of our member churches, a permanent update of our programmatic work is needed, as well as cooperation in new initiatives. For example, in the last few years, the World Council of Churches developed a new program called "Churches` Commitments to Children." It received an overwhelming engagement from our member churches which are now supporting each other in the efforts to create a better world for children, the most vulnerable and beloved part of our entire family. This program benefits from the support of international organizations such as UNICEF. This might be a great opportunity for WCC and CEC to work together with our churches in Europe.

As many of you might know, the World Council of Churches organized a world mission conference in Arusha, Tanzania, in March this year. It produced a "Call to Discipleship" aimed to be relevant for Christians living in different contexts. "Discipleship is both a gift and a calling to be active collaborators with God for the transforming of the world (1Thessalonians 3:2). This journey of discipleship leads us to share and live out God's love in Jesus Christ by seeking justice and peace in ways that are different from the world (John 14:27). Thus, we are responding to Jesus' call to follow him from the margins of our world (Luke 4:16-19)." Sometimes we should remember that many in Europe are amongst those living in the margins of the world. Sometimes, we Europeans have rightly been seen as those who marginalised the others - and sometimes still do. The reality of division in Europe is also an issue of supremacy, thus also of racism in Europe, as well. Our search for unity must be a quest for justice and peace for all. Being created in the image of God, called to be witnesses of Christ, we need to be walking, praying and working together.

The World Council of Churches is represented in this Assembly also by two observers: Bishop Dr Staccato Powell, Central Committee member from the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, United States of America and staff member Fr Daniel Buda, coordinator of Church

and Ecumenical Relations. Both will be with you all the time, carefully listening to everything here and later reporting so that we can better work together in the future!

Wishing you a successful and inspiring assembly, I remain yours in our common Lord Jesus Christ,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General Secretary
World Council of Churches