



Conference of European Churches  
Conférence des Églises européennes  
Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen  
Конференция Европейских Церкве

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**European concerns regarding the suggested legislation on compulsory translation of non-Danish-language sermons.**

Brussels, 26 January 2021

Excellencies,

With this letter The Conference of European Churches (CEC) would like to express concerns regarding the suggested legislation on compulsory translation of non-Danish-language sermons into Danish. Below we argue our case from a European integration, church and rights perspective.

CEC was founded in Nyborg in 1959 with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (Folkekirken) as one of the initiators. CEC is a fellowship bringing together 114 churches from Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglican traditions from all over Europe for dialogue, advocacy, and joint action.

CEC indeed recognises challenges adhering to integration in Denmark and throughout European societies. However, CEC's Member Churches also possess extensive experience of the positive role that religious communities can play encountering such challenges successfully.

Hence, it is with concern that CEC is taking note of the suggested Danish legislation re translation of sermons into Danish from their original language.

In particular CEC wishes to highlight three items:

- Historically, there are numerous examples within CEC's Member Churches of the positive effect and unproblematic use of mother tongue in religious contexts. Examples come from the many churches across Europe that preach in the mother tongue of local Christian minorities: German Lutheran churches in Hungary, Romanian Orthodox churches in France, Anglican churches in Sweden, or Danish Lutheran churches in Spain. In all of these places, churches have assisted migrants to join and form communities that support and help them navigate the societal context of which they are now part. CEC finds this positive and beneficial for integration and for society as such.
- Politically, CEC sees such legislation as an unreasonably negative signal in relation to religion and the role of religious communities in society. Furthermore, it would be an indicator to non-Danish, European nations and Christian communities that their religious practise and presence in Denmark is questioned and deemed unequivocally problematic. Why should German, Romanian, or English congregations with a long history in Denmark suddenly have to translate their sermons

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into Danish? This would taint the image of Denmark as an open, liberal and free nation built on a Christian heritage of individual rights and duties. In this regard we emphasise that art. 18 of the Lisbon Treaty grants the right to every European citizen “to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States.” The right to use foreign languages is fundamental for this right to be fully exercised.

- In terms of rights, CEC points to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), to which Denmark has acceded. Article 9 para. 2 states that every citizen has “freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs” and that this right can only be subject to restrictions necessary in a democratic society “in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others”. The Convention is part of Danish law. If a proposal imposes financial and practical burdens that are not necessary to maintain order, health and morals, such a proposal is an obstacle to full realisation of freedom of religion and belief within the ECHR. Finally, CEC would like to stress Denmark’s legal obligations to the European Charter of Regional and Minority languages of the Council of Europe which came into force in 2000. This Charter concerns in particular the German speaking communities in Denmark.

From the outset during the cold war, CEC was a meeting place for Eastern and Western European churches across geographical, political and cultural differences. The bilateral and multilateral dialogue between churches and reconciliation after World War II were important themes, and solidarity between different European peoples and churches has always been central.

In its work CEC focuses on promoting peace, justice and reconciliation in Europe, strengthens church fellowship, promoting the mission of the Church and raises the Member Churches’ voice in Europe and in particular the European Institutions.

On this background and with the argumentation above CEC express concerns regarding the suggested legislation on compulsory translation of non-Danish-language sermons into Danish.

We look forward to receiving your reply and will be available to discuss our concerns during a virtual meeting along with church representatives of Denmark and CEC.

Yours faithfully,

Rev. Christian Krieger  
President

Dr. Jørgen Skov Sørensen  
General Secretary

Copy to:

Peter Skov-Jakobsen, Bishop of Copenhagen

Birger Nygaard - Head of the Ecumenical Office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

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