



European Parliament 16 November 2021, Article 17 Dialogue Seminar

CEC CONTRIBUTING TO THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

By Lena Kumlin, Senior EU Policy Advisor, Conference of European Churches / Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Thank you for selecting such a topical and import subject for this Dialogue Seminar. The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) is indeed a well-needed initiative. CEC - a fellowship of 114 Churches from Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican tradition from all over Europe, with the mission to work for a humane, social and sustainable Europe at peace with itself and its neighbours - is excited about, committed to and ready to contribute to the CoFoE.

It is now almost ten years ago since the EU received the Nobel Peace Prize for advancing the causes of peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe. In connection with this, Facebook issued in 2012 a competition in which the contestants were to explain what peace in Europe means for them. The winning slogan - which got the most likes on Facebook - was formulated by a young Maltese man, Larkin Zahra, who got to travel to Oslo as a part of the official EU delegation to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Zahra's winning slogan – *what peace in Europe means to me* - was:

*“My grandparents would have said a dream.
My parents would have said a process.
I say that it's my everyday reality!”*

A dream – a process – an everyday reality. Today, we might take our European everyday reality for granted. Maybe we have lost a bit of the original dream, the vision -the soul of Europe.

In my view, one of the most important aims of the ongoing CoFoE is to revive this dream. To renew our hope. To reclaim our common European values. To reaffirm our commitment to developing the European project. To strengthen the soul of our Union – the title of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's State of the Union Speech this year.

Contributing to the European project and reflecting on the future of Europe has always been and will remain on the agenda of CEC. Some years ago, in 2016-2017 CEC launched a public discussion on the future of Europe. An open letter - *What Future for Europe?*- was discussed by CEC Member Churches in four regional consultations throughout Europe. Within the scope of this process, the role of the EU as a beacon of hope and the need to recapture the spirit that inspired the founding fathers – including reconciliation,



forgiveness, solidarity, human dignity and equal respect for all – was strongly emphasized.

The CoFoE is indeed an interesting and innovative initiative, that we hope will lead to concrete outcomes, truly contributing to a joint vision of the direction the EU should take in the next decade and beyond.

How can we then as CEC – together with other Article 17 stakeholders – be involved in and contribute to the process, bringing forward our dreams, hopes, visions and concerns regarding the future of Europe? What could be our role, added value and specific contribution to this process? From a CEC perspective, I would like to mention three points: *Values, Involvement and Participation*.

First, *Values*. From a CEC perspective, the EU is primarily not an economic union, aiming at increasing competitiveness, but a peace project, based on common European values.

Although all the nine main topics of the CoFoE are important and relevant, we think that protecting and promoting our common European values: respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law –should be at the core of the Conference, as these are the glue that keeps the EU together. These fundamental values need to be translated into concrete EU policies – concerning climate change, sustainable economic policies, social justice, digital transformation and migration policies to name a few examples.

Second, *Involvement*. The aim to on a broad basis involve all European citizens and civil society in the CoFoE is applaudable, as is the special focus on youth – the real ‘future of Europe’. However, we also need to listen to and learn from the experiences of elderly people – ‘the grandparents of Europe’, especially as regards peace and reconciliation.

From a CEC perspective, Europe is larger than the EU. We find it very important to also listen to the voices, hopes, visions and concerns of citizens from candidate countries and potential candidate countries in the Western Balkans. We also need to learn from the British Brexit experience.

Third, *Participation*. We welcome the innovative approach of the CoFoE introducing new forms for interaction and participation such as European Citizens’ Panels and the multilingual Digital Platform.

From a CEC perspective, we are committed to and willing to contribute to the CoFoE. Representing – through our Member Churches – millions of Europeans in all EU Member



States and beyond and being present at all levels – from grassroots and local to national, European and global – we definitely have a specific contribution to make. In this respect, CEC together with COMECE would have appreciated an official point of entry into the CoFoE process. I am convinced that this also goes for all other Article 17 stakeholders.

In CEC, we have kept our Member Churches informed about the CoFoE, encouraging them to get involved in the process at national and local level and to be active on the digital platform. I would like to mention some concrete examples of CEC activities relating to the CoFoE:

- Together with COMECE, we will arrange an event – *Our Hope for Europe* in Brussel on 7 December. Our aim is also to present a joint Statement on the Future of Europe to the CoFoE in the beginning of next year.
- Faith in Europe – a British and Irish network of individuals and faith community organizations focusing on European issues, held an online consultation on 21 October, resulting in a written submission that will be submitted to the CoFoE.
- The Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland Tapio Luoma will discuss about values guiding the future of Europe with Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto on 23 November in Helsinki as one of the national *Direction of Europe*-events linked to the CoFoE.
- An online discussion about CoFoE and values between the Archbishops of the Finnish and Swedish Lutheran Churches is planned take place in coming months.

To conclude, CEC wants to actively participate in the CoFoe, with special focus on strengthening our common European values, promoting the common good and the well-being of our planet and of both present and future generations.

Coming back to Larkin Zahras slogan – ‘*My grandparents would have said a dream. My parents would have said a process. I say that it’s my everyday reality.*’, we wish to reaffirm our hopes, visions and dreams in this exciting process – the CoFoE – thus giving a soul to our European everyday reality.