

**Conference of European Churches  
12<sup>th</sup> Assembly  
Trondheim, Norway  
25 June – 2 July 2003**

**A12/Doc.36e  
2 July 2003**

## Final Report of the Policy Reference Committee

### **New challenges in a new European context**

#### *Jesus Christ Heals and Reconciles – Our Witness in Europe*

Given the theme of the 12th Assembly, we believe that the tasks and visions of the Conference of European Churches must first and foremost be seen in the light of this promise of the Gospel. Within Europe many people and communities need healing and reconciliation. Europe and its churches are confronted with new challenges. Some of these are shared by other continents, others are specific to Europe.

The enlargement of the European Union has broken down some borders and created new ones, Europe has become increasingly multicultural and multireligious. Demography has changed, adding to ethnic and religious pluralism. Old concepts of "East" and "West" have become obsolete, and there is a need to reconsider traditional concepts of "Europe". No confession is confined to one particular part of contemporary Europe. Therefore CEC has to consider Europe as a unity of diversity.

Countries formerly under undemocratic are undergoing a complex process of change which brings about new opportunities for participation, but also frustrations.

Christian tradition has been decisive for the development of Europe today. The churches of Europe, however, face a general challenge: the secularisation of minds. Apathetic secularism constitutes a particular problem, on the other hand the desire for spiritual values and experiences is growing. There is thus a need for strengthening the Christian voice in this continent. We need to define our common mission, its contents and goals, we have to learn from each other and pay particular attention to those churches which, as in some of the countries in transition, are in a particularly difficult situation.

To achieve this, theological work is of the utmost importance for CEC and its member churches in the 21st century. Theology is not mere speculation but something helping the churches "to give an answer to everybody that asks you to give a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3.15) This involves respect for the dignity of human kind, the importance of spirituality in worship, and the commitment to mutual exchange and support between member churches.

CEC makes it possible for us to share different ways of experiencing spirituality. Spirituality is a proper theme for studies in dialogue between churches and should include experiences from young people.

## **LIVING TOGETHER AS CHURCHES IN EUROPE**

The most important task of the churches in Europe is the common proclamation of the Gospel, in both word and deed, for the salvation of all. It is of great importance for Christianity in Europe that the common witness of the Christian churches is not blurred by conflicts amongst them. The Charta Oecumenica provides the members of CEC and the CCEE with a tool for furthering cooperation between churches on local, national and European levels. Minority and majority churches have a task to assist each other in becoming more deeply involved in our common faith. To underline the overall community among Christians in Europe, direct contacts between Christians of all confessions in Europe should be encouraged, as well as cooperation between CEC and its associate member organisations.

The Policy Reference Committee recommends:

- 1. That CEC support the endeavour of a Third European Ecumenical Assembly, in 2007 in Eastern Europe, as a joint project of CEC and CCEE (Conceil des Conférences Episcopales d'Europe).**
- 2. That theological cooperation between the various confessions within CEC be continued. Special consideration should be given to intensify the process of clarification between Orthodox and other member churches, as well as the cooperation between CEC and CCEE.**
- 3. The outcome of bilateral and multilateral dialogues should be communicated to the member churches, and in cooperation with other ecumenical bodies evaluated and focused. Particular emphasis should be placed on questions of Christian unity, ecclesiology, ministry, and theological education.**
- 4. That the commitments of the Charta Oecumenica on mission be implemented, making sure that churches help each other and avoid competing with each other. CEC should be ready to assist in creating fora and enabling discussions. Studies on the concepts of "mission", "evangelisation" and "proselytism" have to be carried out in order to achieve a consensus on their meaning. The guidelines of conduct between the churches should be further developed and promoted. Member churches should be offered mediation by CEC, provided both parties ask for it.**
- 5. That CEC support the efforts of majority churches in assisting minority churches in the case of discrimination by secular authorities, underlining the importance of religious freedom and the diversity of spiritual traditions within Christianity. Minority churches should be encouraged to cooperate with majority churches to bring forward together a Christian**

witness. Both majority and minority churches should show respect for each others' traditions and contributions in society.

6. That CEC encourage churches to welcome churches for migrants and ethnic minorities as sister churches contributing to the preaching of the Gospel, entering in dialogue with them and assisting them in practical questions.
7. That the work in the committee on Relations with Islam in Europe should be continued, in cooperation with the CCEE. Interreligious dialogue should be considered in the context of the developments within the European institutions and the initiative »A Soul For Europe«.
8. That CEC encourage and support the exchange and coordination between the churches in the field of religious instruction and ecumenical education of lay people and clergy and bring the importance of this matter to the attention of the European institutions. CEC and CCEE should encourage the theological faculties in Europe to form an interconfessional conference or network for ecumenical research and find ways to develop a research programme for examining the textbooks of religious education in Europe and develop criteria for an ecumenically balanced religious instruction.

## **CEC AND EUROPE**

Rapid change makes it necessary to monitor closely what is happening both at national and at European (Council of Europe and European Union) level in order that the voice of the churches is heard, both in spiritual and social matters and in the case of general ethical questions such as bioethics and the environment. CEC has had positive experiences in expressing the voice of the churches to the EU Convention on the Future of Europe. The Convention's willingness to consider the churches as institutions and partners for dialogue makes the continued monitoring of and dialogue with the European institutions even more important. Healing of memories is essential for harmony in Europe. For this reason nations and governments should recognize failures and shortcomings in the past. Reconciliation is a value deeply rooted in Christian tradition.

The Policy Reference Committee recommends:

9. That, through its Church and Society Commission (CSC) and with reference to CSC's stated work programme, CEC keep its membership informed about developments on the European level and present a common voice to the European institutions and political bodies such as the Council of Europe, the EU Commission, Council, Parliament and Convention, and the European Court of Human Rights. CEC should continue to monitor the work of the OSCE in the field of human rights and on freedom of religion. CEC should also further develop an effective and stable framework for dialogue with the European institutions.

10. That CEC continue effective cooperation and work sharing with COMECE (COMmission des Episcopais de la Communauté Européenne) and other church offices in Brussels.
11. That CEC scrutinise political, economic, social and other changes in the European states, reminding politicians of their responsibility to ensure economic security for groups like the unemployed, the poor, the disabled, and marginalized people, and to implement a strategy of social and economic inclusion. Churches should also be reminded of their responsibilities in this regard.
12. That CEC scrutinise the ongoing legislative work of the European Union, in close contact with the member churches, as well as the implementation of the conventions of the Council of Europe, in particular concerning minorities such as the Sinti and Roma and the Sami people, and call upon the churches to work for the improvement of the status of these people.
13. That attention be given to the maintenance of individual and collective religious freedom. Churches have to deepen their dialogue on the understanding of human rights, including social, economic and cultural rights, and the relationship between individual human rights and ethnic, religious and other identities.
14. That CEC encourage and enable its member churches to pursue the debate on European integration, the implementation of the results of the Convention on the Future of Europe, the coming Intergovernmental Conference, the accession of new member states to the EU, and the situation of European countries staying outside the EU.
15. That CEC stimulate further discussion within the member churches on what is meant by "Christian values". There should be an exploration of how these values relate to the values of other communities of faith and conviction in Europe, in view of secularisation and other changing circumstances.
16. That CEC engage, with its member churches, in discussion of concepts of identity, geographical as well as ethnic, secular as well as confessional, at regional, national, and European levels.
17. That healing of memories as a prerequisite for reconciliation be encouraged and supported by CEC and its member churches. Particular care should be taken to promote education in non-violent conflict resolution.
18. That the churches, at the national level, and CEC, at the European level, record and communicate positive experiences and examples of reconciliation in different societies and actively participate in reconciliation processes.

## **FACING GLOBAL PROBLEMS IN A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE**

We have to realise that globalisation is not only about economics and politics, but also involves security. It has also cultural and spiritual dimensions. As churches and as an international community we have to avoid Eurocentricity and contribute to a strengthening of Europe's sense of responsibility for the whole of humanity, particularly for the poor and marginalised. The human consequences of migration inside Europe and from outside Europe are increasingly a concern for the churches.

Vulnerability is an inherent part of human existence and our interconnected global world. That was clearly demonstrated on September 11, 2001, and by its aftermath. But attempts to build up mechanisms to eradicate vulnerability tend to constrain civil liberties and infringe human rights. They lead to military escalation which absorbs much needed resources.

The Policy Reference Committee recommends:

- 19. That CEC, through its Church and Society Commission, engage in a theologically based reflection on the relationship between vulnerability and the concept of security, including the question of shared values between European and North American churches.**
- 20. That CEC strengthen its engagement in bringing the views of the churches into the debate on a common European security policy.**
- 21. That CEC and its member churches continue to contribute to overcoming violence, including efforts to facilitate ceasefires, the prevention of civil war and interethnic conflict, and to support acts of reconciliation.**
- 22. That CEC address the need to control and reduce the arms trade as another means of reducing violence and encourage the strengthening of the EU code of conduct on the arms trade.**
- 23. That CEC continue to participate in and to assist member churches to prepare themselves for the debate on the challenges of economic globalisation which is going on with WCC, WARC and LWF, and to provide tools for their engagement in national and international discussion about globalisation. CEC must also continue to monitor the development of the European Social Charter.**
- 24. That CEC in coordination with CCEE and WCC monitor the development of the Permanent Forum For Indigenous Peoples (United Nations/ECOSOC) and monitor how land rights and cultural right of indigenous peoples are protected in Europe.**
- 25. That CEC continue to highlight the challenges of the environment and sustainable development, monitored and addressed by the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN).**

- 26. That CEC continue to consider effects of EU policies on the economies of the South. CEC should for example engage in the current discussions about the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.**
- 27. That work with migrants in Europe be strengthened through the integration of CEC and CCME, in order to protect the rights of migrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities. Special emphasis needs to be given to the protection and rehabilitation of victims of racism, new forms of slavery and trafficking, with particular consideration of women and children. Equally CEC should encourage the fight against the reasons for Migration (poverty, discrimination, racism, lack of economic development) in the homelands of the migrants and encourage the finding of ways to make it meaningful for people in poorer countries to stay there.**
- 28. That consideration be given to the diaconical work of the member churches and to the efforts and expertise of WCC and LWF regarding HIV/AIDS which is spreading particularly rapidly in countries of transition.**

#### **CEC AS A PART OF THE ECUMENICAL WORLD**

The structure of ecumenical cooperation in Europe and in the world has to be reshaped as its present form is not appropriate for the current needs of the member churches. Efforts to rationalise ecumenical cooperation, abolishing competitive overlapping and strengthening mutual cooperation and information, should be continued at global, national and local levels.

The Policy Reference Committee recommends:

- 29. That CEC take an active role in reconsidering the architecture of ecumenical cooperation in Europe and the world, to define clearly who is responsible for what.**
- 30. That, together with the European Protestant Fellowship (Leuenberg) and the Porvoo Communion, CEC clarify the relationship between it and these interconfessional bodies.**
- 31. That Central Committee define the mandate and function of CEC itself within a new configuration of ecumenical and denominational organisations which work in Europe.**
- 32. That CEC invite its ecumenical partners (WCC, European Protestant Fellowship (Leuenberg), Porvoo Communion as well as LWF, WARC, WMC/EMC, Euro diakonia and similar organisations) to initiate or to continue dialogue with them about sharing resources and division of labour.**

## **THE ORGANIZATION OF CEC AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS MEMBERS**

It is important that all member churches feel ownership of CEC. Young people are ecumenically significant at all levels in CEC. Therefore it is important that Christian young people in Europe and associated Christian youth organisations also see themselves as integrated parts of CEC.

CEC should use all means to improve communication with the member churches and the public at large. There should be a clear distribution of labour between staff, commissions and member churches. Administration has to be simplified, and the work of the General Assemblies made more effective.

The Policy Reference Committee recommends :

- 33. That Central Committee examine possible structural improvements of the organisation of staff work, including the question of the feasibility of having three separate locations.**
- 34. That Central Committee oversee the improvement of communication between Staff and Presidium and the member churches, clarifying areas of competence and responsibility.**
- 35. That working methods be improved in line with the recommendations set out in the CSC papers on work programme and methods. Working methods should be based on the active participation of the member churches and associated organisations, and wasteful overlapping be reduced.**
- 36. That the CEC home page be further developed as an effective, interactive means of communication for the member churches, Christians in Europe in general, and for the world at large.**
- 37. That CEC, in order to strengthen ecumenical work on migration, asylum and against racism in Europe, pursue the process of integration between CCME and CEC based on the agreement of cooperation of January 2000 between CCME, CEC and WCC and to establish a joint negotiation group.**
- 38. That Central Committee establish a strategy group to evaluate solidarity work in the overall context of CEC activities. Church organisations working in the area of solidarity – Eurodiakonia, WCC, CCME – should be included in the strategic work.**
- 39. That CEC continue its support of member churches in the development of their diaconal service and strengthen its networking and coordinating role.**
- 40. That the strategy group also evaluate the work of the women's desk and develop further strategies to promote the gender perspective in the work**

of CEC as well as the further work on the themes of violence and trafficking in women. These strategies should involve partner organisations such as the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women and the European Forum of Christian Men.

41. That Central Committee evaluate the way the work of the General Assembly is organised in order to increase the quality of interaction and effective participation.
42. That Central Committee, in consultation with the member churches, clarify the role and mandate of associated organisations in relation to member churches and to CEC.
43. That the youth dimension within the CEC structures be strengthened. Member churches should be urged to have 20% youth delegates in their delegations for the General Assembly. Courses for young and for new members of Central Committee, Commissions and Working Groups should be arranged at regular intervals.
43. That CEC cooperate with youth organisations such as Syndesmos, EYCE and WSCF Europe in organising and facilitating ecumenical encounters of young people in Europe.