

**CEC 12th Assembly
Trondheim (Norway), 25 June – 2 July 2003
Partners` Programme
Hearings in the Core Programme
Information about the Hearings**

Hearing 5:

- Title:** Facing Common Challenges in a Changing Europe – a Christian Perspective in the Baltic and Barents Regions
- Responsible Organization/s:** Theology in the Baltic region (Theobalt) in cooperation with the Council for Christian Churches in the Barents region
- Date and Time of the Hearing:** Thursday 26 June 2003, 1500hrs-1630hrs
- Used languages:** English with simultaneous interpretation to German
- Main Speakers / Presenters:** Bishop Jonas Jonson, Strängnäs Sweden; Bishop Biörn Fjärstedt, Visby Sweden; representatives of Theobalt and of the Council for Christian Churches in the Barents region
- Description:** Facing common challenges in a changing Europe – a Christian perspective in the Baltic and Barents regions is the title of a hearing arranged in co-operation by the Baltic Church network Theobalt and the Council for Christian Churches in the Barents region. Although different to their structures, these two ecclesiastical bodies are serving as bridge builders between Christians within these adjacent regions in the northern part of Europe. In the Baltic region there is Theobalt, an informal network for Orthodox, Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches. The Council for Christian Churches in the Barents region has a formal structure and gathers the northernmost dioceses of the Orthodox and Lutheran Churches in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.

Theobalt – a Baltic Church network:

Theobalt – short for ‘Theology in the Baltic region’ - started on the initiative of the Diocese of Visby, Church of Sweden around 1980. From the beginning it was a series of conferences with the purpose to offer a platform for discussions on current social issues from a theological point of view. The third conference in 1994 was an environment conference dealing with the Baltic Sea. The participants’ acknowledgement of a common responsibility for the environment in the area became a challenge to find new ways to a joint Christian contribution to take responsibility for the future Baltic Society. The idea of a network was introduced and the transition of Theobalt from a series of conferences had started. Today Orthodox, Lutheran and Catholic Churches from all nine countries bordering the Baltic Sea are affiliated to the network – majority Churches as well as those having more or less a minority status. The work is co-ordinated by a standing committee elected by the participants of the latest conference Theobalt V in 2001. Most churches have also elected a contact person, which means that there are approximately 20 permanent Theobalt representatives around the Baltic area.

There are no formal statutes or decisions, only a ‘preamble’ defining the purpose

A network among churches around the Baltic Sea

- to further mutual understanding and strengthen relations between the three main Christian traditions
- to develop the contribution of churches to the life and culture of the nations and to the protection of the environment
- to promote Christian values, reconciliation, democracy and peace

Note: Whatever is done within the frame of the network should have a Baltic dimension

A basic principle for the network is the respect for the independence and individual heritage of each Church. The collaboration cannot encompass more than what each Church considers true to its own tradition.

The transition from conferences to network has resulted in a broader approach of actions. Three main fields have been distinguished: 1) Dialogue/Meetings between people; 2) Studies; 3) Communication;

Council of Christian Churches in the Barents Region

The last decades of the 20th century saw an ever growing number of inter church contacts in the Barents region, particularly in the aftermath of the political changes in Europe 1989 – 1990, when the borders of Russia was opened. It resulted in the foundation of the Council of Christian Churches in the Barents region in 1996 at an interchurch conference initiated by the Diocese of Nord-Hålogaland in northern Norway. The

Council is formed by eight dioceses in the region of the Orthodox (three from Russia, one from Finland) and the Lutheran tradition (one each from Russia, Norway, Finland and Sweden).

The purpose of the Council, defined in its statutes, is

- to promote the understanding inter church co-operation in the Barents region
- to foster contacts and relations between the Churches on different levels in the region
- to be a platform for the Churches of the region for information and discussions on topics of mutual interests
- to be a forum for co-operation with other development agencies in the region in matters of common interest

The Council meets to an annual General assembly. The executive work is run by an elected board of six members, which usually meets four times a year. The diocesan bishops and one more representative from each diocese are official participants in the assembly together with the members of the board. Moreover guests and lecturers are invited. At the assembly of May 2003 in Petrozavodsk, the co-ordinator of Theobalt was invited to present the network to mark a possible link between the Council and Theobalt.

The activities of the Council of Churches in the Barents region are found within five fields: 1) Links and exchange programmes directed towards groups and individuals; 2) Environment; 3) Deaconry; 4) Original population; 5) Study and research. In October 2002 the Barents Regional Council decided to invite the Council of Churches in the Barents region to be a permanent observer at the Regional Council.

Important principles in the work of the Council for Churches in the Barents region are: respect, friendship, openness; co-operation, reciprocity, love and “no interference in the each others’ internal church life”

Common challenges and a Christian perspective – the hearing

The Baltic and Barents regions are meeting places for Orthodox, Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches. For centuries these Christian traditions have lived side by side in this northern part of Europe. They have influenced their societies and considerably contributed to culture, customs and nation building. Historically they have encountered in their belief and in practical Christian life through good and ill. Due to the extension of the European Union, they are facing a changing society. What will then happen to their traditions? What are their role and their contributions in this new era? What are the challenges and how can they become an asset in a changing Europe? These are some of the issues that will be raised in the hearing on the role of the Churches in the Baltic and Barents regions during the CEC Assembly in Trondheim.

The hearing will be introduced by the Rt Revd Dr Jonas Jonson, Diocese of Strängnäs, Sweden. Then there will a short presentation of the two ecclesiastical bodies. The main part of the hearing will be a panel

discussion with representatives from the different Church traditions. The panel will be moderated by the Rt Revd Dr Biörn Fjärstedt, Diocese of Visby, Sweden. The audience will be invited to participate in the discussion.