

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

**Hearing 16:**

- Title:** Central & Eastern Europe – The Social, Economic and Environmental Challenges  
Tasks for all the European Churches & Civil Society
- Responsible Organization/s:** The European Contact Group (ECG) in partnership with the Work and Economy Research Network in the European Churches
- Date and Time of the Hearing:** Friday 27 June 2003, 1030hrs-1230hrs
- Languages Used:** English and German
- Main Speakers / Presenters:** Rev. Christian Popescu, chairman of the Work and Economy Network (WEN) and member of the Executive Committee of Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)  
Participants of the Budapest Ecumenical Consultation on economic, social and environmental consequences of Globalisation
- Description:** . Twelve years after the major changes in Europe, there is amongst the positive developments, growing cause for anxiety. This hearing will highlight the specific areas where the churches should engage themselves for the future common good of the whole of Europe in the global context. Together we will look at the specific concrete problems facing people in their local situations – urban and rural and at the possible ways to engage with these issues and problems. The hearing will also address the questions of building up civil society in an effort strengthen democracy and build sustainable community. In spite of the fact that some of the countries in the region will join the European Union, many problems remain unsolved and new divisions are emerging. These issues are major challenges for churches and ecumenical groups in Central and eastern Europe.

In the first decade after the change, the western European churches supported the call for immediate help in the process of restoration and reconstruction. This hearing will call the 'western' churches to face their responsibility for the whole of Europe in new ways in the second decade of transition. The responses needed now are in many cases different because we face the long term task of social and economic development and the building of civil society.

The hearing will bring together grass root experts and researchers who will present the challenges and demonstrate creative possible ways forward for the churches in the wider Europe. This will be posed not just in terms of request for support, but also in terms of a challenge to the values, priorities and theologies of the churches. The experiences of the theological project developed as part of the process by partners in four countries, east and west ([theology-factory.net](http://theology-factory.net)) will highlight the theological and social ethical perspectives and insights.

The key issues are:

- rising unemployment, low pay and poverty and deterioration of work life conditions
- rising feelings of insecurity, a lack of trust in the democratic process and continuing corruption
- negative impacts of transition on health, education and welfare (including lack of basic social rights in some cases)
- migration and displacement of people
- significant double negative impact of transition on women

And the following priority actions will be highlighted:

- working collaboratively to build sustainable communities in the region (meaning economically, socially and culturally sustainable)
- addressing the rise of low pay, unemployment and inequality as well as of precarious working conditions (e.g. non-legal work, work for payment in kind, work for no pay)
- the continuing need to build up civil society in the region and the provision of opportunities for networking, training and common action.
- addressing the erosion of social and economic rights, including the right to basic means for survival and the changing structure of the welfare systems to include more payments for services
- acting to stop the growth of local indebtedness (personal and collective) in rural areas as services are privatised and agricultural unemployment grows
- supporting local and structural alternative strategies to address the problem of the future of agriculture and rural communities

- addressing the challenges to the meeting of basic human needs in a market driven system with great inequalities (e.g. energy and water supplies) and also continuing environmental threats.