

‘You shall be my witnesses’ (Acts 1:8)

Justice – Witness – Hospitality

CEC Assembly 2018

Novi Sad, 31 May – 6 June 2018

Work shops

1. Social imbalances in Europe – Reflections on challenges for Societies and our Churches

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group on Employment and Social Issues in cooperation with Eurodiaconia

Social imbalances in Europe have grown due to the financial and economic crisis since 2008. As the CEC Constitution defines, CEC “will work towards building a humane, social and sustainable Europe at peace with itself” (Art. 2) the discussion about social imbalances is a central part of CEC’s mission.

The workshop will present a theological approach on reflecting social imbalances but present also examples of engagement of CEC Member churches and church organisations to address these phenomena.

Participants will exchange about their perception of the social situation in Europe defined by social inequality, the challenges and opportunities for the churches and consider recommendations for the churches.

2. What will be the world of work tomorrow? Discussion on digitalisation and the churches reflection on “good work”

Responsible: CEC’s Church Action on Labour and Life network

Work, labour, employment is one of the most significant determining factors of modern life as well as it is a key driver for a just society. With the process of digitalisation, it’s going again through a far-reaching transformation. CEC’s Call network has worked on Christian reflections about this transformation, based on the tradition that Churches are calling for good and decent work which relates to the dignity of the human being, created in the image of the triune God. CALL contributes with this discussion also to the preparation of the 100 years jubilee of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The thematic session will introduce the analysis and the reasoning of CALL to open a debate which will enrich CALL’s analysis and reasoning and will ensure that work as a determinant of human life is a recognized part of CEC’s discussion on the future of Europe.

3. Persecution of Christians: situation in Syria and Iraq

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group on human rights

On 3 February 2016 the European Parliament adopted the resolution on systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called ISIS/Daesh. The religious and various ethnic minorities in Syria and Iraq are continually and systematically facing slaughtering, abduction and torture; many are enslaved or killed (especially women and children who are subjected to different forms of sexual violence or have been victims of forced marriages or human trafficking) etc. Among all these brutalities churches places of worship, mosques, shrines, commentaries are intentionally vandalised and burned. The hearing will explore what churches can do more to address the permanent violation of human rights in Syria and Iraq vis-à-vis International organizations such as the UN, CoE, EU and OSCE? How they can help build just society for religious minorities to co-exist peacefully with majorities?

4. Freedom of Religion or Belief brings Justice for Minorities and Majorities

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group on human rights

The hearing will address the violation of religious freedom in Europe that CEC Member Churches are facing with in their life and work, whether they are a minority or majority. During the hearing there should be stock-taking of the current challenges and discussion on how CEC can assist as much as possible its members in helping them to address their issues vis-à-vis international institutions in the most effective way. Issues such as access to worship places, property rights, registration, state financing etc. are just some of many challenges that many churches in Europe are still facing. How we can build justice in our society for all? The shrinking space for civil society and the role of religion in the public sphere will be also part of the discussion.

5. Witness to Climate Change – Justice to God’s Creation – Hospitality to all Creatures

Responsible: European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN)

Christians believe in a God who created hospitality by transforming an inhospitable space into space for a living Earth; whose Son brings justice to heal a broken world and whose Spirit witnesses to the whole created planet. Yet we acknowledge that human behaviour does not accord with God’s plans for the wholeness and sustainability of life.

This is why churches are engaged in environmental campaigns and eco-activities across Europe – in how they manage their resources such as energy, food and water; in how they encourage lifestyles respectful of biodiversity; in working with other community organisations to address climate change, and so on. The European Christian Environment Network (ECEN) promotes and develops such work across different countries as signs of hope.

The Season of Creation (1 September – 4 October) initiated by the recommendation of the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios in 1989, promoted by ECEN, respected and celebrated by an growing number of churches across the continent offers us an opportunity to reflect and act on sustaining the beauty of God’s universe.

How might you engage further in such ministry and expand your work to sustain God’s living Creation today?

6. Sharing God’s earth and its riches justly

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group Economic and Ecological Justice

We live in the midst of God’s great gifts. However, we have become entangled with structures of injustice. In acquiring economic wealth we have caused damage to creation that sustains us. Both climate change and loss of natural biodiversity risk bringing chaos to life on earth. And we have not shared the wealth we have acquired equally. Both within countries, across Europe and around the world there are great and systematic inequalities of wealth. Poverty exists alongside affluence within communities at every geographical scale. As Christians, we are called to confess that we are part of these structures. We are called to witness to our faith to the Creator by working to change these injustices. We must practice hospitality both towards our fellow human beings and towards other creatures. In the workshop will provide an opportunity for sharing of experiences, forming new partnerships and learn new ideas about how to share God’s earth and its riches justly.

7. Ecumenical fellowship of churches: How is it relevant for the Conference of European Churches today?

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group Ecclesiology and Theological Dialogue

The Conference of European Churches is “an ecumenical fellowship of Churches in Europe which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. The members of CEC, therefore, “seek [...] to pursue together the path of growing conciliar understanding [...] to continue to grow in a fellowship of faith, hope and love [...] to make a common contribution to the mission of the Church, to the safeguarding of life and the well-being of all humankind [...] to share their spiritual life, to strengthen their common witness and service and to promote the unity of the Church and peace in the world.” *Charta Œcumenica* underlines that “European Churches have a responsibility to call each other to a life of reconciliation as an expression of Christian unity and for the sake of the well-being of Europe and the world” (CEC’s *Constitution*, Preamble, p.1).

In view of these affirmations, how is ecumenical fellowship perceived and expressed by the members of CEC? What have been the recent achievements of ecumenical dialogue in this respect on the European level, and what are the issues that still divide the Churches? In what ways is the visible unity of the Church relevant for the life of CEC?

8. Interreligious work in the face of migration in Europe

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group Ecclesiology and Theological Dialogue.

Organised in cooperation with the Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe, the Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation Programme of the World Council of Churches, and the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

Churches in Europe involved in interreligious work can offer a timely and meaningful contribution vis-à-vis the challenges of the current migration situation and increased political polarisation in Europe. Interfaith engagement may offer a remedy to the rising Islamophobia, antisemitism and racism. Facing fears and adequately addressing them is a significant concern for Christians in Europe at the present time. Engaging in interreligious work and theological reflection can contribute to overcoming them. The session will address concerns of the Churches in Europe with regard to interreligious work, and explore the interreligious aspects of migration from both practical and theological perspectives.

9. Refugee protection – a task of the churches

Responsible: Churches’ Commission in Migrants in Europe

The workshop will briefly examine the biblical foundation of the work of churches in support of refugees, underlining the principle of hospitality to the “stranger”. It will then highlight a few examples of how churches in Europe reacted to the refugee arrivals in 2015 and the following years. It will then examine future challenges in refugee protection, e.g. a possible need to revisit the internationally accepted definition of refugees in the context of globally just arrangements or the challenge posed by increasing externalisation of refugee protection to the borders of Europe.

10. Ecclesiology in times of migration

Responsible: Churches’ Commission in Migrants in Europe

Organised in cooperation with CEC Thematic Reference Group on ecclesiology and theological dialogue.

The workshop will explore how the character of churches in Europe is being shaped by the reality of migration and ecclesial hospitality. It will examine some of the results of the consultation “Being a Church in Europe Today: Migration and Ecclesiology”, of December

2016. The European response to the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* developed at the consultation will be reviewed. This workshop will contribute spiritual, pastoral, and theological perspectives on migration to the important global dialogue on what it means to be a Church.

11. Democracy and Populism: The Role of Education and of CEC

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group education for democratic citizenship

This workshop deals with the issues related to the rise of populism in Europe, the hazards posed for democracy and the educational role of the churches.

It will start with a dialogue between a "populist" and "non-populist" perspective on democracy followed by a written dialogue of the participants on the following questions:

- How should education promote democracy and guard against the simplistic solutions of populism?
- How could your church demonstrate the practice of democracy in its own life?
- What are the challenges for CEC in dealing with current educational issues?

The first two questions focus directly on the theme of the workshop, the third question encourages participants to think about future activities of CEC in the field of education.

About the method: Each poster is dedicated to one of the questions, written in the centre of the paper. A "written dialogue" happens in silence, which means participants write key words, statements or questions with markers of different colours on prepared posters on a table. Other participants contribute with own contributions, comments, making links, question or exclamation marks as would happen in an oral dialogue. The facilitator decides about the timing of this phase.

After preparation, the posters will be presented and discussed by the participants.

The method of written dialogue allows for creative ways of exchange and provides a document for further debate and discussion.

13. The role of religion in Peace and Conflict

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group Peacebuilding & Reconciliation

Research shows that religiously defined conflicts have been on the rise in the last four decades. At the same time, there is a rise of religious fundamentalism and religiously justified violence. Among other factors, religious identity makes conflicts hard to resolve. Churches have also been involved in conflicts, thus compromising their prophetic witness. This makes the healing of memories even more difficult to achieve. On the other hand, churches and religious leaders or communities have played a crucial role in building bridges and paving the way for sustainable peace. The workshop will explore the biblical and theological metaphor of the Reign of God as the theological underpinning of the work of churches in witnessing peace in their daily life. It will also examine the promotion of justice and hospitality for a sustainable future of Europe. Lastly, it will demonstrate how a change of mind and heart (*metanoia*) is needed so that churches in Europe commit anew to their calling for peace and reconciliation demonstrating actively their witness to Christ and promoting justice and hospitality.

14. No peace without justice! No justice without peace!

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group Peacebuilding & Reconciliation

Christian Churches rooted in Christ's Cross and Resurrection see themselves as signs of peace and reconciliation into the world. However, Christian approaches to peace and reconciliation vary. The debate over the question in the last decades has led churches to an increasingly common understanding, although there are still Christians who hold different positions with regard to the use of violence in resolving conflict. The session will explore how the link of the

“Ecumenical Call for Just Peace” between Peace and Justice has been taken up by those Churches accepting the use of violence in resolving conflicts, the historic Churches that advocate nonviolence and peace, and those Churches that do not have a comprehensive theory due to various historical and theological factors. The session will elaborate the vision of Christian Churches advocating justice and peace as manifested in key texts and theological reflection of the Churches in Europe taking into consideration important developments worldwide.

15. Bioethics and the development of science. Challenges for the future

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group Bioethics

Biotech and science continue to press the limits of what we can do and at times also the question, what we should do. The normative implications of many scientific developments give rise to fundamental questions related to beginning and end of life issues. The questions and issues have theological, philosophical, societal and anthropological implications that call for a thorough and careful deliberation from the churches. How are the churches to respond to, for example, genome editing? Increasingly efficient prenatal testing? Heated discussions on euthanasia policies? All of these questions touch on and challenge the churches to ponder how to be a church in the light of these scientific developments.

16. The dialogue according to Art. 17 III TFEU: opportunities and challenges

Responsible: CEC Thematic Reference Group on EU policies and legislation

As Christians we cannot remain silent when justice, peace or the integrity of our creation are at stake. Therefore, many of EU’s current policies demand a critical reflection from an ethical perspective. The dialogue with the EU institutions is a wonderful tool to bring in the churches’ expertise and their common witness as it is about a number of various political issues – from migration, asylum, and social policy to human rights and climate change. Those are on the agenda of both the EU and churches, and churches can add value being a critical counterpart, thus contributing to the European project in a constructive and positive manner, for example by highlighting how hospitality towards strangers can be lived in practice.

The intention of the Workshop is to present background and structure of the dialogue, to highlight challenges and points for reflection in order to broaden the understanding in CEC Member Churches on this important instrument of political interaction, dialogue and exchange, with the aim of strengthening and enhancing the dialogue between the EU institutions and the Churches.