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Strategy and Policy Committee Report

Introduction

Europe is a wonderful and troubled continent. Narratives thought dead have reappeared; new narratives are sought from new generations. In a complex pluralist society, in which economic growth has become the dominant driver and migration has too often driven fear and uncertainty, how are the churches, through the Conference of European Churches (CEC), confidently to witness joyfully to a prophetic hope in the name of Christ?

Under the overall theme of “You shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8), the themes addressed by the 2018 General Assembly in Novi Sad were: hospitality, justice and hope. The aim of this report is to set out how CEC can establish a policy direction that can be implemented in a hospitable, just, and hopeful way that builds our common witness to Christ in the light of the Charta Oecumenica.

Joyful acceptance of a new constitution allows the focus of CEC to move to shaping its culture as a vehicle for the prioritising of more external matters, both ecclesiastical and societal. That represents the journey from Budapest to Novi Sad.

The journey continues

The process of agreeing a new constitution has compelled CEC to adopt a lighter and more sustainable structure. In order for such a light structure to work not only cohesively, but also effectively, it is vital that the diversity of life in our member churches and *Organisations in Partnership* should be recognised, celebrated and promoted. This means making space for a wider range of voices, strengthening CEC’s commitment to engage a younger, more diverse constituency. CEC should aim to work closely with other agencies involved in facing common challenges and opportunities in Europe, seeking to inspire a new generation to face change confidently and joyfully.

This involves learning from the experience of minority Christian communities and taking seriously the concerns of our young people. CEC needs to engage younger people in all its work, possibly making space at the cost of older generations of ecumenists in order that a new course can be set that captures the imagination and commitment of a new generation. CEC should challenge the security-driven concerns of society (arising from the 20th Century experience of war) and promote a society of solidarity and mutual justice.

The churches of Europe need CEC in order to maximise Christian witness and prophetic challenge in a complex and rapidly-changing world. Recognising that churches exist for the sake of God’s kingdom, CEC should keep its remit as simple and clear as possible. Its priorities must be achievable and affordable with the resources available. CEC should accordingly add value to what churches are doing on a local level and not try to do what others can do better. Its offices should be directed accordingly.

To this end we commend a policy direction around the three themes of witness discussed at Novi Sad:

Policy

The Strategy and Policy Committee recommend three thematic policy areas, emerging

from repentant discipleship and consequent witness to the healing Christ. Repentance must begin with Christians themselves allowing their minds to be renewed and transformed (Romans 12:1-2).

1. **Hospitality:** offering Christ's welcome to all – especially those feeling ignored, discriminated against or oppressed by society - amongst us, in our churches, in our countries and in our continent. Hospitality (loving one's neighbour as oneself) is commanded by Christ (Luke 10:25-37).
2. **Justice:** seeking to embody and commend justice shaped by grace and mercy. This directs our attention towards environmental, economic, social and ethical/relational concerns and must involve expressed concerns (particularly by younger people at Novi Sad) for human rights and freedom of religion and belief. Christian unity is around the cross and not simply in a common set of values.
3. **Hope:** Christians are drawn by hope, not driven by fear. Theological and other dialogues can help churches articulate and live out – whatever our circumstances and challenges – a form of bridge-building between people that offers the world a different and joyful model of relating: loving, living, learning.

Strategy

The Governing Board needs to develop a strategy (and set clear targets) in order to fulfil CEC's vision. The Strategy and Policy Committee highlight the following strategic points for CEC for the next stage:

1. CEC must add value to the witness of the Member Churches:

- **Internally** - that CEC becomes more relevant to member churches, improving and expanding its modes of communication.
- **Externally** - to Europe, the European institutions, and civil society within the wider world, taking seriously changes in the world's order.

2. CEC must change its mode of operation:

- **Internally** – consider developing more regional work in an appropriate balance with central functions, whilst paying attention to costs of flexibility in travel for participants. CEC should act as a facilitator, enabling collaboration and the sharing of information and resources. This includes finding different ways of communication, consultation, and working mechanisms – the media landscape is evolving rapidly – and evaluating progress.
- **Externally** – Optimise relations and co-operation with *Organisations in Partnership* and other agencies (both religious and non-religious) engaged in similar work. Strengthen engagement with other Christian, interfaith, and secular bodies (e.g. Action for Churches Together Europe, Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, European Christian Convention, Global Christian Forum, World Council of Churches, Consilium Conferentiarum Episcoporum Europae, COMmission des Episcopats de la Communauté Européenne).

3. CEC must remain sustainable

- **Internally** – effective management requires constant review of finance, personnel, and priorities in seeking to fulfil its remit. Member churches must support CEC in order that CEC can support them, and achieve what the member churches ask CEC to do. If we want it, we must resource and pay for it. This must be consistently reviewed and evaluated in the light of the priorities established in this document.

- *Externally* – consider the ecological impact of CEC's work, continuing to enhance the sustainability of the planet and its resources.

Recommendations:

Hospitality, justice and hope need to be both the dynamic for and the lens through which CEC should see all of its work.

Hospitality:

- Given the challenges of increasing national populism in Europe, CEC should maintain and further develop its work with the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME).
- CEC should encourage networking, facilitating, and sharing resources and experiences, strengthening solidarity between member churches – particularly in relation to interfaith dialogue and co-operation (together with WCC).

Justice:

- CEC should strengthen the integration and engagement of young people at every level of its work and decision-making, recognising that this might mean a shift in its culture and practice, working with EYCE and other youth organisations to further develop youth participation in the Ecumenical Movement.
- CEC should continue to identify where capacity might be added to the priority of human rights, peace building, freedom of religion and belief, and reconciliation in Europe (including between churches), facilitating the training and equipping of young people particularly for this task.

Hope:

- CEC should seek both to challenge and inspire member churches for local and national engagement with politics, economics and cultures, utilising tools such as receptive ecumenism and theological dialogue – all rooted in an incarnational commitment to God's world and people made in the Imago Dei.

These recommendations encourage CEC to root its priorities in a theological anthropology that asks us what would make a good society.