
Conference of European Churches (CEC)
Conférence des Eglises européennes (KEK)
Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen (KEK)

Consilium Conferentiarum Episcoporum Europae (CCEE)
Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE)
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INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE DIGNITY

In conclusion to their meeting, the members of the Joint Committee of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and of the Council of Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE) approved the following message.

The underlying theme for reflection at the annual meeting of the CCEE and CEC Joint Committee was National identity and European integration: the contribution of Christians. The meeting took place in Belgrade, defined by the Catholic Archbishop of Belgrade H. E. Mgr Stanislaw Hocevar as the City of Bridges, placed between West and East. This was relevant to all attending, as one of the aims of meetings between CCEE and CEC is to bridge divides and promote contact between Christians belonging to the different Eastern and Western European traditions. Archbishop Hocevar also explained that Belgrade means the White City. "This name leads us to the absolute, the beauty of the Risen Christ and of the Heavenly City, and therefore reminds us that by returning to the source of our hope and drawing closer to the flow it generates we can as Christians contribute to building the city of man".

Following the various contributions on this main theme articulated in order to understand Europe's situation today more fully, the conviction emerged that every human being is endowed with non-negotiable dignity. Such dignity derives from having been created in the likeness of God, in Himself a communion of persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore the human person is not limited to the individual dimension, but also intrinsically enjoys a social being. Belonging to a family, a nation and many other types of community is a part of every person's identity. Even though each person is unique, no-one can truly fulfil their calling without relationships others.

Christians know that their fundamental identity derives from baptism. This enables Christians to discover themselves as human beings and thus to serve others. This is where belonging to the Church, meaning the family of God, originates, and this becomes a part of their identity, resulting in social responsibility.

Identity is not immutable throughout the life of a person, a city or a nation. There is a continuous development of new elements which may become challenges to our identity, sometimes enriching it and on occasion creating tension. But this is precisely why identity is an in-depth experience, and remains a call to dialogue with brothers and sisters coming from afar in order to work together for the promotion of the common good.

Peace requires realism and a focus on issues other than mere economic growth, stated the Deputy Prime Minister and Chief of European Integration of the Serbian Government, Mr Božidar Đelić. It requires that our frame of reference also embraces the question of national identity without allowing it to degenerate into nationalism. This is the

only way for us to find safe ground where we can open our arms to others without fear of our own destruction.

In this context, religious freedom cannot mean relegating the religious dimension to private life - this was the outcome of the discussion stemming from Professor Massimo Introvigne's paper - an attitude which fosters relativism or denial of any belief. Religious freedom is a right and a value that every democratic society should be open to promoting and safeguarding. In this spirit the members of the Joint Committee chose to draft and send a letter to Baroness Catherine Ashton, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Union, asking that the issue of protection of religious freedom and Christian people in the world is tabled at the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the EU, due on 21 February. They also requested that a clear sign is given regarding decisions on common policies displaying the engagement of the European Union for the defence of religious freedom for those of all faiths throughout the world. The reference to the persecution of Christians, the urgency of which has been proven by recent events (particularly in the Middle East, in Iraq) cannot be forgotten or buried by abstract and fruitless policies. Western countries where specific relations with areas where persecution exists should show their concrete commitment in protecting all those who are persecuted due to their faith, whichever that faith may be.

This is the motivation of those continually searching for the good, for justice, peace, truth and the beauty of ecumenism, the latter always a space for encounter and dialogue both on a personal level and that of communities wishing to undertake a journey towards a deeper unity, a journey involving the identity rooted in every one of us and which enables us to discover the gifts of others. This requires continuing conversion. Without all this the unity of the Church will always be an unrealistic aspiration. On the other hand, if we can deepen our friendship with others, we are actually preserving our identity as we move towards the centre from the periphery of life, as Dr Joanna Matuszewska indicated.

The example of the economic crisis of our times was also an opportunity to reflect seriously on the relations between Europe and the nations it comprises. This issue was tabled with the help of the Rev. Rüdiger Noll Director of the of the CEC's Church and Society Commission and Mgr. Piotr Mazurkiewicz General Secretary of the COMECE (Commission of the Episcopates of the European Community). The outcome of the discussion highlighted how without solidarity and other values the discovery and preservation of which are the result of an pilgrimage of faith, Europe will never be able to reach overall development. It is correct to say that the economic crisis has in fact placed before countries the challenge of having to choose between protectionism and solidarity. We are certain that only when we are sure of our identity are we able to recognise the value of others and the importance of ties promoting mutual assistance.

We believe this is the truth, and can be accepted by all men and women, regardless of their faith, or even where they do not profess one. It is however our Christian faith, along with the strength of God it carries, that enables us to see even more clearly how crucial it is not to give in or fall short of the contribution we should give for the good of those living in Europe, whilst respecting national identity and promoting solidarity. Faith helps us to love our identity and those who are our own, and at the same time opens our hearts to others and encourages us to take that all-important step towards anyone who is in need.

As Christians we have a specific contribution to offer in Europe. And we hope that ecumenism, as a space where traditions, communities and persons meet, may always be able to grow and to witness the engagement of Christians in their attempt to keep alive the love which make us followers of Jesus, in order that we may become agents in building true peace rooted in the hearts of peoples and nations.

The following issues were also discussed during the course of the meeting:

Ten years after *Charta Oecumenica*

The current year marks the 10th anniversary of the signing of *Charta Oecumenica* (22 April 2001). The members of the Joint Committee recognised in this document a process rather than a statement. Such a process is continually developing. They showed keen interest in the initiative of the Ecumenical Institute of the University of Freiburg (Switzerland) where on 9 May a meeting entitled *Ecclesial Communion in Europe* is to be held. The Committee has also praised the many local initiatives representing a time for reflection on ecumenical progress throughout Europe.

The presence of the Roma people in Eastern Europe

CCEE and CEC are about to begin a common process of reflection on the issue of Roma people coming from EU member states (Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria), where they represent a strong minority group. This process will avail itself of experts in the field and aims at promoting concrete initiatives allowing on the one hand for a more effective integration in their country of origin, and on the other to change the mistaken perception they are often subject to in Europe.

Relations with Islam

As they recognise the importance of relations between Christians and Muslims, CCEE and CEC are about to begin a consultation process in their respective Churches and Bishops' Conferences in order to study more closely the state of play and challenges these relations pose. Throughout the year, the two continent-wide bodies will attempt to share the results of the mutual consultations in order to ascertain which steps need to be undertaken in the future.

Meeting with the Apostolic Nuncio, the representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Minister for Religious affairs

On Friday 18 February the members of the Joint Committee were invited by H. E. Mgr Orlando Antonini, the Apostolic Nuncio to the Serb Republic, to a reception also attended by members of the diplomatic corps of a range of European countries. On Saturday 19 February, after having met a number of local communities (the Orthodox Church of St Sava and the Church of St Anthony, Catholic), the Joint Committee visited to the Patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The representatives of the Holy Synod, Bishop Irenej of Backa (Novi Sad) and his Assistant Bishop Porfirje conveyed the greetings of Patriarch Irinej. The meeting ended with a dinner hosted by the Minister for Religious affairs, Mr. Bogoljub Sijakovic.

2012 meeting

The 2012 meeting will be held from 26 to 29 January 2012.

Proceedings took place in an atmosphere of cordiality and friendship, and featured a number of opportunities for prayer. The meeting was held also thanks to the support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and closed on 20 February, after the members of the Joint Committee attended liturgical celebrations in their respective confessional communities.

CEC Members

H. Em. Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, CEC President, Ecumenical Patriarchate
Rt Revd Christopher Hill, Church of England, CEC Vice-President
OKRin Cordelia Kopsch, EKD United, Germany, CEC Vice-President
H. Em. Metropolitan Michael of Austria, Ecumenical Patriarchate
Very Revd Rauno Pietarinen, Orthodox Church of Finland
Dr Joanna J. Matuszewska; Reformed Evangelical Church in Poland
Revd Dr. Katharina Schächl, Reformed Church of France

Revd Prof. Dr Viorel Ionitá, Interim General Secretary
Revd Rüdiger Noll, Director of the CEC *Church and Society* Commission (CSC) and CEC Associate General Secretary
Mag. Elizabeta Kitanovic, Executive Secretary for Human Rights and for Communications of the CEC *Church and Society* Commission (CSC)

CCEE Members

H. Em. Card. Péter Erdő, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, CCEE President;
H. Em. Card. Jean-Pierre Ricard, Archbishop of Bordeaux, CCEE Vice-President;
H. Em. Card. Josip Bozanic, Archbishop of Zagreb, CCEE Vice-President;
H.E. Mgr Stanislav Hocevar, Metropolitan Archbishop of Belgrade;
H. E. Mgr Vincenzo Paglia, Bishop of Terni - Narni – Amelia;
H. E. Mgr Virgil Bercea, Bishop of Oradea;
Mgr Piotr Mazurkiewicz, ComECE General Secretary;

Fr Duarte da Cunha, General Secretary;
Fr Ferenc Janka, Vice-General Secretary;
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The Council of European Churches – CEC – is a communion of 125 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches of all European Countries, and 40 associated organizations. It was founded in 1959. The offices of CEC are in Geneva, Brussels and Strasbourg.

The Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE) gathers the Presidents of the current 33 European Bishops' Conferences of this Continent, represented by their Presidents, and the Archbishops of Luxembourg and of the Principality of Monaco, as well as the Bishop of Chişinău (Moldavia). The President is Cardinal Péter Erdő, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, Primate of Hungary; the Vice-Presidents are Cardinal Josip Bosanic, Archbishop of Zagreb, and Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard, Archbishop of Bordeaux. The General Secretary of CCEE is Fr Duarte da Cunha. The headquarters of the Secretariat is in St Gallen (Switzerland).