



## INVITATION FOR THE CEC 6<sup>TH</sup> SUMMER SCHOOL ON HUMAN RIGHTS

### FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND POPULISM

**17-20 JUNE, LISBON**

*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

Ephesians 4:15-17

Estimated Church leaders,  
Dear friends of CEC,  
Brothers and sisters,

We are very pleased to announce that the 6<sup>th</sup> annual Conference of European Churches Summer School on Human Rights on

### **Freedom of Expression and Populism**

will take place  
**17-20 June 2019**

### **at the Seminário da Torre d’Aguilha,**

Quinta da Torre d’Aguilha 2785-599,  
São Domingos de Rana, Portugal

This year’s Summer School is organised in partnership with the  
**Portuguese Council of Christian Churches (COPIC)**

## Why it matters

We warmly invite participants coming from CEC Member Churches and from other religious communities, including lay and ordained, theologians, scholars, church practitioners. We extend a special welcome to young people and students.

The objectives of the program are

- to **raise the awareness** of participants concerning the fundamental right to freedom of expression, and of political threats to it, in particular from populist political movements,
- to **enable them to argue and speak out** in the face of the dangerous polarisation caused by such movements and parties within societies and within the wider European community,
- to **enhance their personal and professional skills** and expertise when advocating for and defending human rights.

In current discourse, the close proximity of 'Freedom of Expression' and 'Freedom of Religion or Belief' has become a focus of interest. They are often described as 'two sides of one coin'. And indeed, for Churches all human freedom is based in God and God's relationship with humankind. While there can be conflicts between individual human rights, and also between 'Freedom of Expression' and 'Freedom of Religion or Belief', all serve one aim: To create a space in which the human person can develop and flourish, and in which communities can grow. Therefore, Churches are the natural advocates of human rights and freedoms.

However, we live in turbulent times. Freedom of press is curtailed, also affecting religious publishers. Some states have strict laws about the import of religious books and materials from foreign countries in order to control the mission of religious communities. Certain groups even seek to destroy and vandalise religious monuments and spread racial, ethnic and religious hatred among people. If Christians, even church leadership, dare speak out against repressions, as is often the case in countries where populists hold power, they are often silenced easily.

Hence, religious groups cannot freely contribute to the development of the society, to fostering the diversity of opinions, to strengthening democracy and the rule of law, and thus, to proclaiming the good news of God's love for all who turn to him.

Also, Churches and religious communities must be aware that radical political groups seek to draw them into such conflicts, abusing religion as a dividing factor. They should, therefore, educate their believers to recognise and fend off such encroachments. International human rights instruments offer instruments against the spreading racial, xenophobic opinion or propagating war, which can lead to hate crime, even genocide. Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights imposes restrictions on all activities related to 'advocacy of

national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence'. States are required to prohibit such activities by law.

In the 2017 Summer School, CEC dealt with the theme *Theology, Religious Freedom and Populism*. Speakers noted that populists have strong xenophobic attitudes and behaviours which lead to incitement to racial hatred and violence, often related to religion. They highlighted that certain religious groups are subjected to hatred and violence on religious grounds which severely disturbs public order. In Europe hate speech led to hate crimes like the killing of Jews in Brussels Museum in 2014, killing of the priest in the church in France in 2016, killing MP Jo Cox in UK in 2016, for example.

These dangers are increasing with the current emergence of a 'post truth society', in which fake news, deep fake, alternative facts and alternative realities are being generated and disseminated through the media and social networks, in order to manipulate public opinion, posing a significant threat to human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

In the CEC human rights network, the need for more in-depth work on freedom of expression, its relation to freedom of religion or belief, its scope and its limits, was expressed for one of the next Summer Schools. This upcoming Summer School represents an informal way of learning about these issues and is based on academic and practical examples coming from various academic and religious communities.

### **Objectives and Content**

The **overall goal** of the programme is to

- understand the fundamental principles of human rights,
- foster good communication, respect and teambuilding,
- strengthen interreligious and ecumenical cooperation.

The more **specific goals** of the programme are to

- **enhance the understanding** of the concept of 'universality' of human rights, of state obligations and root causes of human rights violations, with an emphasis on freedom of expression;
- **raise awareness of theological links** between freedom of expression and Holy Scripture, of and the way theology is abused for populist purposes;
- **gain knowledge** about international and regional Human Rights systems;
- **learn what to do** when violations of freedom of expression occur and how to create compassion and solidarity with the victims;

- **understand official complaint procedures** at UN, CoE, OSCE, EU, ECHR, ECJ, and learn how to file such complaints.

The course aims at integrating

- theological understanding,
- legal knowledge,
- practical training.

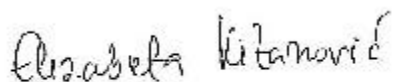
Learning material can be found on the CEC website and Nordic learning platform.

### **Methodology and Conditions**

Training material will be provided, and after the summer school it will be made available on the CEC website. Active engagement of the participants is expected during the course. Every participant sponsored by CEC is requested to write a report upon their return home on how the knowledge and information provide during the course they applied practically.

Participants in receipt of subsidy funding who participate for less than 95% of the total duration will not be reimbursed, except in cases of emergency or illness. According to well established practice, during one day of the summer school no animal products will be offered as a contribution to the care of creation.

The fee for the summer school is 360€ and it includes board and lodging, limited to the duration of the summer school programme.



Dr Elizabeta Kitanović

Executive Secretary for Human Rights  
Conference of European Churches