

Comments to the Draft CEC Strategic Plan 2019-2023

Together in Hope and Witness

The aim of a Strategic Plan is to look several years ahead. Firstly, we must see where we are now and then aim to recognize the major tendencies and trends we are going to face. The Strategic Plan should include these elements as its basis instead of being solely a list of various activities which are mainly listed according to the present tasks of CEC's staff.

Europe and the European Union are facing huge challenges at the moment – from common European values, such as democracy and the rule of law, being challenged to raising populist and nationalistic trends, climate change and the migration crisis. The ecumenical movement, CEC and individual Churches are also facing additional challenges, such as positive freedom of religion and the role of religion in the public sphere being constantly questioned, and financial challenges due to declining membership.

The upcoming five-year strategy of CEC should try to respond to these challenges and – based on an external environmental analysis – seek to offer innovative and forward-looking visions, whilst enhancing togetherness, participation and sustainability.

The Strategy and Policy Committee Report adopted by the General Assembly in Novi Sad outlined the future tasks of CEC. "The churches in Europe need CEC in order to maximize Christian witness and prophetic challenge in a complex and rapidly-changing world. Recognizing 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."

Now the draft of CEC Strategic Plan 2019-2023 includes too many things with the result that it is partly hard to see how it could be operationalized. It is more a "wish-list" or a list of potential tasks for the organization than a "strategic plan"? The majority of the tasks listed are important but while CEC can do properly only that much as it can, it is crucial set priorities.

In the draft there are overlaps: things could be combined in one and the same section rather than separated. For example, why not combine into one column bioethics and artificial intelligence and digitalization? Moreover, why is human dignity mentioned explicitly only in relation to digitalization and AI, rather than bioethics, or indeed human rights. Furthermore, migrant rights are human rights too – now they are mentioned in separate columns. In addition, some things come across more as examples that specify what an overarching goal could mean, and some sections mention that staff is needed – this is not the way how strategy should be composed.

If this kind of listing will be used, it would become clearer if:

1. the 4-6 topics under the Aims 1-3 will be called e.g. priorities – and there should be less priorities
2. the priorities will be divided into main ones and under them (a limited amount of) more detailed goals are listed in a systematic manner. For example, in "Building peace and reconciliation in Europe" is now unclear what is advocacy towards European Institutions and what is ecumenical co-operation between churches.

In order for CEC to be a strong and credible partner vis-à-vis i.a. the European institutions, and in order to deliver to and answer to the needs and expectations of its members, CEC needs a strong, bold and visionary Strategic Plan for the upcoming five years. The strategy should be flexible enough to adapt to social and political developments (especially the upcoming strategy for the EU, which is to be adopted in June 2019 and the forthcoming Working Program for the new European Commission to be appointed later this year),

but at the same time concrete enough to guide the work of CEC in the upcoming years.

The conclusions and recommendations presented at the CEC General Assembly in June 2018 - especially in the Strategy and Policy Committee Report, should also be taken into account.

Accordingly, CEC should, in all its activities:

- Add value to the work done by Churches on national and local level
 - Focus on clear, strategic, thoroughly selected priorities
 - Network and collaborate with other partners
- in short – do less but do better; or 'keeping its remit as simple and clear as possible', as formulated in the Strategy and Policy Committee Report of the General Assembly.

The key strategic aims suggested in the draft – Promoting peace, justice and reconciliation in Europe, Deepening church communion and ecumenical fellowship and Raising the Churches' voice in Europe and toward European institutions – are relevant and pertinent but might be further developed in line with the three key themes presented at Novi Sad – Hospitality, Justice and Hope.

The CEC work on the different themes should also be more coordinated and interlinked, with an underpinning '**ABC**' focusing on:

- **Advocacy work** – enhancing high-quality and timely advocacy work on all issues, involving members and also sharing best practices
- **Building bridges** between both churches, ecumenical partners and other faith-based actors, and with European institutions and other collaboration partners
- **Communication** – enhancing both internal and external communication, including strengthening the visibility of CEC.

We were asked to point out three to four strategic goals, accordingly, CEC should focus on the following key issues:

AIM 1. CEC promotes peace, justice and reconciliation in Europe by

- Building and enhancing peace and reconciliation
- Contributing to the future of Europe and developing a new narrative for Europe
- Supporting interreligious and intercultural dialogue, diversity and plurality

AIM 2. CEC deepens church communion and ecumenical fellowship by

- Developing ecumenical fellowship and ecumenical partnerships
- Continuing and deepening the theological dialogue
- Strengthening the role of and collaboration with migrant and minority churches.

AIM 3. CEC strengthens the voice of Churches in Europe and towards the European Institutions by

- Strengthening the dialogue and collaboration with the European Institutions
- Promoting human rights, respect for human dignity and freedom for religion or belief
- Advocating for economic, social and ecological sustainability and justice (this would include topics such as wellbeing economy, digitalization, AI and bioethics)
- Defending the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in collaboration with CCME

The Strategy Plan would need to be combined with an **annual or bi-annual working program**, which should

- set detailed, concrete, clear, realistic and measurable aims and targets for the work, efficiently using the resources available
- efficiently use the resources available

- promote team work, collaboration and interaction between both staff, members, various experts and networks

In order to implement the strategic aims, CEC should, in addition to traditional working methods (thematic reference groups, conferences, seminars), develop new ways of working, such as ad hoc working groups, various projects, webinars etc. Members should be actively involved, in order to tap their expertise and experience, and to share best practices, in line with the aspirations of the CEC renewal process. There should also be a mechanism for sharing best practices. For example, regarding economic and ecological justice, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is strongly committed to advancing climate action and climate justice. A new and ambitious Strategy for Climate and Energy was adopted in February 2019 and other churches could benefit from it instead of starting similar work from the beginning. CEC can provide a European-wide forum for international co-operation in these matters.

The majority of member churches are members in several ecumenical organizations. Therefore, in order to involve members in various aspects of the work of CEC, member churches should be informed on upcoming events and working groups much in advance.