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Reflections upon the change of the English name

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## **Nytt fra den verdensvide kirke – Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)**

### **Sammendrag**

Det vises til CPCE-sak på forrige møte i MKR om foreslått endring av engelsk oversettelse av CPCE, fra Community of Protestant Churches in Europe til Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe.

Som vedlagte notat fra CPCE viser, er dette en endring av oversettelsen som CPCE mener de har dekning for i vedtak fra generalforsamlingen i Basel i 2018, og som styret derfor vil implementere på møtet i juni 2020. Medlemskirkene gis imidlertid mulighet til å komme med kommentarer.

Vedlagt følger forslag til kommentar/svarbrev fra Dnk.

### **Forslag til vedtak**

Mellomkirkelig råd takker for utkast til svarbrev til CPCE og ber om at brevet sendes med de endringene som fremkom i møtet.



Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa (GEKE)  
Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)  
Communion d'Eglises Protestantes en Europe (CEPE)

## Reflections upon the change of the English name

In its decision to put forward the proposal to complete the process of changing the English name as soon as possible, the Council was led by the following reasons:

1. The discussions in 2002/2003 which led to the renaming of the “Leuenberg Church Fellowship” to the “Community of Protestant Churches in Europe” were conducted in German. When it was clear that the “Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft” should become the “Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa” and that “Communion d’Eglises Protestantes en Europe” would be the French equivalent, it was only left to decide the English equivalent. The term “fellowship” was deemed to have more of the connotation of non-binding conviviality. “Community” was favoured over “communion” mostly because of the scope for confusion with its usage in “Holy Communion”, but this was not subject to much discussion.
2. The doctrinal conversation on “Church Communion”, working from 2013, came to the conclusion that neither “church fellowship” (as used in the English version of the Leuenberg Agreement) nor “community” correctly reflects the theological significance of the ecumenical model of CPCE. Therefore “church communion” was used as the English equivalent for “Kirchengemeinschaft”, and § 46 on terminology was included in the text ensuing from the doctrinal conversation: “To avoid misunderstandings and establish harmony with international ecumenical linguistic usage, the term “church communion” was to be given preference in future.”
3. When the Council asked the member churches for their responses to the text in summer 2016, it included in the accompanying guiding questions one asking for the opinion about a change of the English title from the “Community of Protestant Churches in Europe” to the “Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe”. There were both approvals and objections, whereas the majority of the churches responded that the decision could only be welcomed if the native English-speaking churches were also to support it. Thus the Council decided that there was not enough support to yet submit the matter as a proposal to the General Assembly.
4. At the General Assembly, however, some delegates in the English-language working group for the document on “Church Communion” emphasised the importance of changing the name. In particular, the representatives of anglophone churches broadly agreed that the term “Community” in the English name should be replaced with “Communion”. The only reason for the General Assembly not immediately passing this as a resolution was that the issue had not been placed on the agenda in advance. The objections that had been raised by some churches were also recalled, but none of the delegates adopted them. Therefore the GA passed the resolution 2.1.6 quoted above with the commission to the Council.
5. The Council was of the firm opinion that it might resolve to change the name, as mandated by the General Assembly, of its own volition. As the General Assembly’s decision explicitly cites a process, however, it suggests preceding any such resolution with additional steps. Further theological or linguistic reflections do not seem necessary, since not the result of the process, but only the steps within the process can be discussed.
6. Therefore the Council members resolved to reassure themselves once more of the member churches’ agreement. The Council is of the firm opinion that the GA’s resolution strongly insists upon this, but nevertheless it wants to give those churches which still might have concerns the opportunity to express them.

## **A Comment from the Church of Norway to the process of correcting the English translation of CPCE**

Oslo, March 2020

The Church of Norway is aware of the process of correcting the English translation of CPCE. We would like to remind you of our official response to the Church Communion Document in 2017, in which we stated:

We appreciate the attempt in Paragraph 46 to explain linguistically the challenge of translating the concepts of *church fellowship* and *communion* between different languages, as it is done in Paragraph 46. We understand the intention of bringing this in line with international ecumenical uses of the term *communion*. We are not convinced, however, that the translation of *Kirchengemeinschaft* in German into *Church communion* in English is correct, nor that it is necessary. A similar linguistic challenge can be found in Scandinavian languages. In our understanding there is a theological distinction between the terms *Church Fellowship/Community* and *Church Communion*, while *Kirchengemeinschaft* does not contain this distinction and can mean both. We could support an understanding of *Kirkechengemeinschaft* as church communion, meaning a deep organic understanding of churches belonging to one other. This, however, does not mean that a more binding structure is necessary as a model for church communion. Anyhow, we find that the term *community* sufficiently expresses the fellowship to which we are committed. At this point, we would therefore recommend to keep the current name of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe.

Although we do not see the need for changing the English translation of CPCE, we take into consideration the Final Report from the General Assembly in Basel (point 2.1.6) and will not protest against the proposed change. However, as clearly communicated during the Basel Assembly and in the response process to the Church Communion document, the Church of Norway considers this change a linguistic correction and not a change of the identity of the CPCE or its theological or structural self-understanding.

With these comments, we are looking forward to maintaining and to deepening our commitment in CPCE. We are happy for the continuing process within the CPCE of reflecting on what it means to be church, and what it means to be in communion with each other. Although we for different reasons hesitate to enter into further formalisation of structures of the CPCE, we want to reiterate our commitment to our common journey as Protestant churches in Europe. In this commitment lies a strong sense of communion, in our common witness and service to the gospel.

Yours sincerely,

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General Secretary  
Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations