

Call and Witness Q&A

The CEC Governing Board has decided on a better profiled and clearly church-based organisation under the heading “CEC’s Call and Witness”. CEC will be equipped with more theological staff whilst at the same time improving our shared advocacy presence in European Institutions. To pursue this vision and reach CEC’s goals, the Governing Board has reassessed the current work-portfolio and organisational set-up and evaluated external relations to create a less dispersed, more focused high-impact organisation.

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1. What can Member Churches expect from their future membership?

Member Churches first and foremost become part of a European, ecumenical fellowship of church dialogue on challenges and opportunities for church and society today. In particular, Member Churches gain access to the highest level of decision making in Europe, the European Institutions in Brussels, and major European institutions in Strasbourg. And they have available a common European “hub” for theological reflection on matters pertaining to church/state/society which they themselves will become an important part of.

2. What will be expected from Member Churches in the coming years?

CEC will to a lesser degree have experts in particular thematic areas in the secretariat. The secretariat will to a larger degree consist of experts in “public theology” (church relations to state/society) and experts in how to approach the European Institutions. This means that CEC will rely on thematic expertise found in the Member Churches. We know that larger churches have more human resources and hence more skilled staff that can occasionally allocate time for CEC. However, we also know from our dialogues that larger churches are ready to feed into the fellowship from their resources to the benefit of smaller churches.

3. Will there be changes in the secretariat set-up?

Yes. The future will see one secretariat based in Brussels comprising two units, each with three staff. A Theology and Studies Unit and an Advocacy and Dialogue Unit. The two units will work together and be inter-dependent to fulfil the goals of the organisation: To conduct advocacy work in the European Institutions on a theologically reflected foundation. Whereas the Theology and Studies Unit will be staffed with theologically skilled staff with expertise in “public theology” and a good understanding of CEC’s diverse ecclesial nature, the Advocacy and Dialogue Unit will build on staff with experience and skills in navigating the European Institutions with a view to maximising CEC’s advocacy impact.

4. Can the Governing Board decide without consulting the General Assembly?

Yes, for two reasons. First, legal advice deems that the proposed changes in the secretariat set-up remain within the remit of the Governing Board, referring to the Constitutional provisions in Article 8 (9) which states that The Governing Board has the power to “ensure effective organisational and strategic planning”. Furthermore, the proposed changes are built on the findings and recommendations of The Uppsala Report which was processed and adopted by the 2013 General Assembly in Budapest, however never fully implemented.

5. Where is the youth in all this?

Young people are fully part of CEC's constituency with seats in governing bodies. CEC has no Youth Department but collaborates with existing European Youth Organisations. Interviews conducted in spring 2021 among youth representatives with a relation to CEC, e.g. to Thematic Groups, show a particular interest for European political discourses: *"All interviewees said that they would welcome it if CEC increased its focus on European policy making by bringing together church representatives and by forming a strong ecumenical theological voice in European political discourses"* (from Lea Schlenker's report to the GB). Priority in this area of work along with focus on youth participation is expected to boost youth commitment and interest in CEC.

6. How do we know Member Churches want this change?

The suggested changes build on the findings and recommendations of The Uppsala Report which was largely adopted by the 2013 General Assembly in Budapest. Furthermore, the General Secretary has conducted interviews with a broad selection of ecumenical secretaries and church leaders from Member Churches, Organisations in Partnership as well as with Governing Board Members. Whereas not all wishes and suggestions can find place in CEC, major trends and findings are integrated into the suggested strategy. Furthermore, the President has recently taken the opportunity during international meetings and visits to air the main proposals. The responses have been encouraging and positive.

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7. Are there any legal implications?

Yes. A few amendments in the Standing Orders are needed. However, legal advice deems that the proposed changes in the secretariat set-up of the organisation are not causing a deviation from the overarching strategy adopted by the General Assembly in Novi Sad, 2018, and laid down in the current Constitution (Art. 2.1(3)). As long as CEC continues to work on these areas over time there may be periods of time where the given financial context would lead CEC to prioritise some of the thematic areas over others, it is legally argued.

8. Why will CEC cease financing organisations that are not part of CEC?

CEC will cease financing organisations that are not part of CEC. Over several years CEC has supported financially and with administrative services a number of autonomous organisations beyond CEC's organisational set-up. Most significantly CCME (Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe) and ECEN (European Christian Environmental Network) but also the CALL Network (Church Action on Labour and Life). Due to a shrinking financial framework over recent years, CEC has cut in its own activities. The resources that have been allocated to external organisations beyond CEC, however, have been maintained and have thus grown disproportionately. Today a substantial part of CEC's revenue is re-allocated to activities beyond CEC. The

Governing Board has decided that contributions for CEC should primarily be spent on CEC's own activities. The withdrawal from financial support to organisations that are not part of CEC will happen gradually and after negotiation.

9. Is this a final break between CEC and CCME, ECEN and CALL Network?

No. CEC, ECEN and CALL Network will stay as close Organisations in Partnership (OiPs) and CEC will look to support them with the special theological skills and the improved dialogue skills vis-à-vis the European Institutions that will in the future be the most significant and profiled competences of CEC. CCME, ECEN and CALL Network will hold the thematic expertise which will be less present in CEC in the years to come. As part of the transition, CEC is negotiating with a Member Church regarding support for a dedicated fund raiser that will mitigate the loss of direct financial support and services from CEC to the organisations in question.

10. How will the work in Strasbourg be maintained?

Due to fading financial support from local partners, the Strasbourg Office will be closed. CEC's work towards institutions in Strasbourg will be maintained and managed from Brussels where one staff member from the Dialogue and Advocacy Unit will have special responsibility monitoring policy making activities in Strasbourg. Budget resources will be allocated to cover travel and accommodation to the extent needed. This will not fully cover the existing effort in Strasbourg; however, it must be remembered that neither currently is Strasbourg covered with a full-time position (only 60%).

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11. Will virtual meetings and IT play a larger role for CEC in the future?

Yes. The Covid-19 sanitary crisis has developed a culture of virtual meetings and interaction not open to us before. CEC as an organisation has (similar to other organisations) moved on a steep learning curve with regard to implementation of virtual means. But we have come to see the potential of virtual meetings and IT. Also, software for virtual meetings is being developed with a very fast pace at the moment. CEC will aim to exploit the potential of a varied and innovative types of communication to the full while still keeping in mind that ecumenism is (also) about meeting people in real life.

12. What about the traditional ecumenical bi- and multilateral dialogue?

Focusing on "public theology" and strengthened advocacy in the European Institutions, more traditional ecumenical bi- and multilateral dialogues and interfaith dialogue is left with e.g. CPCE, WCC (Faith and Order) and not least (applying the subsidiarity principle) local Member Churches or National Councils of Churches. CCPE and WCC are well equipped for this kind of work and has opted to strategically pursue and equip themselves for this traditional line of ecumenical work. The importance of

such is by no means diminished in the proposed set-up, but investigations among Member Churches and exchanges in the Governing Board show that this it is not a prime request from CEC Member Churches.

13. Does “public theology” mean preaching to politicians?

No. It is fundamental to the proposed model that CEC must be equipped to speak in a language which is both understood and relevant to decision makers and politicians. Preaching is the language of the church to the believers gathered in the church in fellowship with a shared framework of belief. Speaking on matters of concern outside the church, we must always have our theological foundation in place, but the way we express ourselves must reflect the shared framework of the audience and not that of the church. This is what “public theology” attempts to do.

14. Will CEC become a lobbying organisation?

No – but in a certain way also yes. CEC is not a lobbying organisation. CEC does not defend its own interests but proposes a certain vision of life in society on the basis of biblical anthropology. CEC is nevertheless registered as a lobbying organisation with the European Institutions. But we generally do not use the “lobbying” label to describe what we do, giving priority to terms like *advocacy* and *dialogue*, in our attempts to influence the political line of Europe’s decision makers. Attempting to gain influence on political decisions in the European Institutions is traditionally labelled “lobbyism”. In that sense CEC is already a lobbying organisation and as such registered in the EU Transparency Register.

15. Is this the end of ecumenical, theological dialogue in CEC then?

No. On the contrary. Theological dialogue between the church families and traditions in CEC is strengthened in the proposed model. More staff dedicated to theological reflection and dialogue is fundamental to an organisation which is based on theology. CEC is a diverse constituency and only an ongoing and transparent dialogue between our traditions will equip the organisation to respond to societal issues in a manner that reflects both our diversity and our unity. Such dialogues must, however, always support the core mandate and purpose of CEC be it undertaken in-house on a daily basis or externally in meetings or conferences.

16. What kind of cooperation is foreseen with ecumenical organisations?

CEC’s cooperation with other global and regional ecumenical organisations is expected to continue. However, in a more profiled organisation, focus must be on tasks that CEC is particularly suited and expected to perform, e.g. in relation to CEC’s proximity to and extensive presence within the European Institutions. Given CEC’s limited size and resources, every cooperation must be measured against relevance

and benefit for CEC's purpose.

17. Will the pandemic have an impact on future revenues?

We do not know yet. CEC has over the last 12 - 18 months built up instruments that constantly monitor our revenues and month by month detect any significant changes compared to previous years. So far, we have no concrete indications that revenues in 2021 will be less than anticipated. This said, we know that some Member Churches have struggled financially during the pandemic. The Governing Board believes the best way to mitigate negative developments is to show that CEC is an added value to Member Churches.

18. Has any consideration been given to longer term financial plans?

Yes. There is a number of options available to CEC to secure a more stable financial future, e.g. investment in dedicated human resources from major Member Churches or consortia of Member Churches. The secretariat has received indications that there is an interest for this kind of cooperation. First and foremost, however, CEC needs to look into the instability of membership fees from a recurring group of Member Churches. It is not fair to the paying members that this issue is not addressed and the Constitution opens for action. It is also believed that ownership is enhanced if Member Churches pay – even if only with minor membership contributions.

19. Does CEC have a comparative advantage over other organisations?

Yes. CEC is a faith-based organisation with certain specific privileges vis-à-vis the European Institutions, laid down in Art. 17 of the Lisbon Treaty (TFEU). Art. 17 requires EU to facilitate an on-going dialogue with churches and other faith and philosophical communities. This sets CEC apart from the majority of “lobbying” or advocacy organisations in Brussels.

20. Are there no alternatives to the suggested plan?

Yes. The decision of any organisation on how to move forward is one decision among several potential ones. However, the Governing Board believes the current plan is the one that best takes into account the elements considered: CEC's current financial situation, a work portfolio that is too large for the current staffing, the wish partly to improve the sense of ownership among Member Churches, partly to strengthen advocacy work within the European institutions, and finally the need to respond to new expectations expressed by the European Institutions. Furthermore, the Governing Board holds that the suggested model responds in the best possible manner to the call from Member Churches, reflecting fundamental decisions over the last decade, establishing CEC as a church-based constituency, gathered as an

organisation in the heart of European decision making.

21. Will CEC implement the new plan immediately?

No. CEC will have to implement this plan gradually for financial reasons. CEC is tied to a number of agreements that require CEC to give notice, in one case up to 12 months before any financial changes (CCME). In another instance, the agreement requires 12 months with regard to CEC withdrawal, which can however be negotiated (KKR/Strasbourg) and in one instance there is no agreement in spite of close cooperation and considerable financial and administrative support from CEC (ECEN) which complicates changes. CEC has obviously no interest in harming subsidised partners and will adhere to the agreements unless negotiations can point to better solutions.