



Conference of European Churches  
Conférence des Églises européennes  
Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen  
Конференция Европейских Церкве

GENSEC-2020-065

To CEC Member Churches

Brussels, 27 July 2020

**Let us continue reflecting on Christ and let us be invigorated by means of worship and spiritual fellowship**

### **Update from the General Secretary**

Respected Church leaders,  
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Greetings from Conference of European Churches (CEC) to all Member Churches throughout Europe. I am delighted to take this opportunity to address you collectively six months into my work as General Secretary of our organisation.

It has been months that turned out in a way no one was able to predict. Some eight weeks into my move to Brussels, Belgium went under lockdown as did most other European countries.

CEC immediately took appropriate measures following instructions from local authorities and most staff has been working from home since then. We are only now slowly and in a strictly monitored way loosening the restrictions as an organisation and as society.

### **Work during Covid-19**

The period of lockdown and continued restrictions on international travel have had a substantial impact on the work of CEC. All physical events, seminars and meetings were cancelled or postponed.

Following immediate measures, all staff and Thematic Groups have dedicated much time and effort to [Covid-19 related activities](#), conducting online events and preparing statements of encouragement along with theological reflections relating to this rather unusual situation.

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We are now preparing for the reopening of the European Institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg. We focus on our churches' role relating to the [German presidency of the European Council](#), which took off on July 1st, and the upcoming "[Conference on the Future of Europe](#)" – a process of dialogue that will guide towards the future of European cooperation and European people.

Insights from the Christian heritage that we as churches represent are essential and are encouraged by the EU institutions in both cases.

We have also, however, during and after the lockdown continued working on a number of very concrete issues that I know are essential to the CEC Member Churches.

Already at the beginning of the year, we questioned the EU Commission plans for discontinuing the position of the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union. After correspondence with the President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen in April and later a concerted effort from several faith-based organisations, it was decided to [renew the position](#) to the benefit of marginalised or persecuted faith or belief minorities throughout the world.

[CEC also responded](#) after the decision of the Turkish government to convert the Hagia Sofia into a mosque. Pointing to the potential consequences of Hagia Sophia becoming the cause of confrontations and conflicts, diminishing its legacy as a symbol of peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding, and solidarity between diverse people, letters of concern were sent to the head of the European External Action Service (EEAS), Josep Borrell, and Audrey Azoulay, General Secretary of UNESCO.

Following this act, we have seen strong public statements from both sides. As we know, however, the decision has not been changed. CEC continues to monitor developments.

### **The state of the organisation**

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Organisationally, during confinement regulations in Brussels, I took time to look closely at organisational structures, financial stability and the work portfolio of CEC.

It has been a learning process which has given me a good overview – both with regard to future potential and immediate needs for adjustments, hence safeguarding financial stewardship and future organisational stability.

Throughout, I have worked closely with staff and the Presidency of CEC, both groups representing the diverse ecclesial foundation of the organisation. I am grateful for the fruitful dialogue I have experienced.

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Visits to Member Churches were obviously limited, but I have been in contact with several via telephone or web. On June 5 we conducted an online Governing Board meeting, which guaranteed that accounts 2019 and budget 2020/21 were duly processed. This was made possible by special Covid-19 provisions in Belgian law.

### Let's envisage the future

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At the Governing Board meeting in June, I took the opportunity to introduce three organisational challenges that I believe are of paramount importance to CEC. Three challenges covered by three individual but interrelated terms: Ownership, coherence and visibility:

- **Ownership:** Member Churches own CEC through membership, active participation in the democratic set-up (General Assembly and Governing Board) and the contribution to CEC Thematic Groups. However, I believe we need to be clearer on CEC's added value for our Member Churches. Where can CEC perform in ways that go beyond the sum of its individual members, establishing CEC as a unique and valued platform that is available for its Member Churches to approach and use?
- **Coherence:** The beauty of an organisation is that we work together and stand stronger, empowered by one another to achieve common goals. In CEC we cherish the diversity in opinions and visions that makes up our constituency. However, I believe we need to be more realistic with regard to what is achievable given our size and resources, doing less, but doing it better. How will CEC become better at making priorities, focusing the work in ways that enhance coherence at all levels?
- **Visibility:** If we identify CEC's added value and establish what CEC is expected to do and capable of, we are ready as an essential next step to make ourselves visible to Member Churches and wider society. However, I believe we need to be sharp and strategic in our communication in order to break through. How is CEC reflecting our Member Churches in a world of Christian and secular NGOs in Brussels, Strasbourg and throughout Europe - and how do we communicate this?

A task force on CEC communication has already been appointed, and the autumn 2020 will see dedicated work on ownership, coherence and visibility in order that draft plans for a sustainable organisation can be tabled during the November gathering of the Governing Board this year.

### Prayer and Fellowship

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Walking this road of renewal together with our dedicated staff and devoted Governing Board, I will keep as my guiding principle that CEC is an organisation firmly based on theological convictions of ecumenical hope and courage.

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So as the world is seeking and working hard to create a vaccine against Covid-19 and against the loss of life, let us engage in prayer as our trusted “vaccine” against the loss of hope and the gaining of new life. The hope given to us through Christ crucified and risen is our first and foremost pillar of faith and the one that gives us a both particular and peculiar voice in wider society.

Let us continue reflecting on Christ and let us be invigorated by means of worship and spiritual fellowship.

On this foundation, I look forward to exploring our shared future.

Yours in Christ,



Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen  
General Secretary

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PS: I invite you to keep up-to-date on initiatives and activities of CEC on our website and on social media:

[www.ceceurope.org](http://www.ceceurope.org)

[www.facebook.com/ceceurope](https://www.facebook.com/ceceurope)

[www.twitter.com/ceceurope](https://www.twitter.com/ceceurope)

[youtube/conference of european churches](https://youtube.com/conferenceofeuropeanchurches)

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