

DECLARATION

For a common spirit of Europe

The contribution of the European Christian Convention

“Inspired by our Christian faith and the need to strengthen Christian confidence, witness and service, the European Christian Convention (ECC) seeks to make a significant contribution towards greater unity and integration of people in Europe and to mobilise responsibility”

(Preamble of the association European Christian Convention, 2016)

Challenges for Europe

When we look at the European continent - from the Atlantic to the Ural - today, we note that it is a landscape of complex difficulties and challenges that endanger the European project as a platform for a common vision for peace, justice and equality, human rights and democracy, rule of law, freedom of religion and religious diversity. Strengthening the diversity in Europe and at the same time working towards building common foundations for long term stability has been the unquestioned orientation during the past decades. Although this vision has always been accompanied by a variety of problems in Europe and has never been without conflicts, it was one that was welcomed as a concept with common ground and implemented through political and economic cooperation as well as cultural and cross-border exchange.

This consensus can no longer be taken for granted. The deepening crisis of the European project today is based not only on the dissatisfaction about how and if the problems, such as migration, climate change, debt management or poverty, can be solved. The crisis is also rooted in a deeper questioning of the common vision itself. Moreover, the need for cooperation in specifically European areas, joint reflexion on the understanding and interpretation of values, and the support for European institutions and transnational processes are being fundamentally called into question. Centrifugal forces are strong, nationalism combined with a denial of European ideas and rules, a rejection of “foreigners” and “the Islam” as well as, and most threatening, the growing support for authoritarian forms of rule over against liberal democracies.

These developments and social changes challenge European Christianity today. The Christian heritage, the conviction of prominent individuals, churches and the numerous Christian

grassroots movements have always played an important role in holding on to the vision of a Europe at peace with itself and its neighbours. The European project has emerged from experiences of conflict, in which, alongside many other factors, Christians played an ambivalent role: they were on the one hand an engine for subsidiarity and reconciliation, but on the other hand often an obstacle in reaching equality, such as, during the debate on human rights. Reflections on precisely these experiences have made the Christian vision of peace, freedom and justice not only one of significant importance, but have furthermore helped stimulate the project of Europe as laid down in the Charta Oecumenica:

"We are convinced that the spiritual heritage of Christianity constitutes an empowering source of inspiration and enrichment for Europe. On the basis of our Christian faith, we work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail" (Charta Oecumenica 7, 2001).

Against this background it is obvious that in the current context of Europe there is furthermore the need for a greater and more visible Christian engagement and witness which is self-reflective, fully ecumenical and pluralistic.

The vision of a European gathering of Christians: The European Christian Convention

This vision seeks to make a major contribution for Christians in Europe today, providing opportunity and space. It is geared to generate hope and a refreshed spirit for a peaceful and united Europe, that can more and more be seen and embraced as our common home. A European gathering inspired and initiated by Christians from all over Europe, in ecumenical togetherness, despite diversity and the differing faith traditions, will certainly usher in a refreshed endeavour to strengthen Christian witness in a changing and increasingly pluralistic Europe and could be a key instrument for the healing of memories and wounds in Europe. Such a European gathering will become a significant instrument for working towards justice with reconciliation, for forgiveness, for compassion and solidarity, also with the weakest and ensuring their participation. It will take a stand against hate and aggression; it will be guided by a sense of critical self-reflection and humility in all discussions concerning the Christian heritage and the role of Christianity on questions related to issues of freedom, peace and democracy.

Its insight derived from debates, reflections and other contributions will be shared in the European public square as a part of European civil society engagement. The common ground we already have as Christians and the gospel which we live out in our different church traditions, is an enrichment for us as Christians, but this needs to be further strengthened. A gathering, such as envisaged, offers diversity, as well as the capacity for reconciliation and common action, within and for Europe; within our own communities and for our own healing of relationships with one another, as well as for rekindling a yearning for the spirit of Europe.

The European Christian Convention was founded in 2016. Its aim is to organize the first ecumenical gathering in either 2022, 2023 or 2024. The association is ecumenical, supported by a board and a members' assembly, and invites, in all openness, all organizations, churches and networks to become members or partners and to contribute as appropriate to the aim of this European gathering.

Thematically, the aim of the meeting is to focus on areas that are central to and areas that are able to make a substantial contribution to the European project, giving visibility of greater Christian witness and presence in Europe. We are currently looking at three areas of engagement. They are not to be seen as a "fixed agenda" but as a collection of topics which are currently being discussed by the members of the Association:

- Questions relating to the current state of ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, religious freedom, Eastern and Western differences;
- Questions of society and ethics interlinked to Christianity. Some of the areas of thinking are: migration, prosperity and poverty, social justice and solidarity, European civil society and social cohesion;
- Questions of democracy (public space for open dialogue vs. shrinking spaces for civil societies), values (human rights, equality, human dignity)

The format of a European Christian Convention

Since this is a pilot project, we still need to clarify the details of the event. The European Christian Convention as a registered Association is preparing an invitation for proposals to host and to organize the first convention. The invitation will include criteria for hosting and

organising the event, the selection process and the application deadline. Nevertheless, the following characteristics should mark the convention:

A large-scale participatory event

The event will be organized ecumenically and will be open to all those who are interested. It will bring together people from all over Europe and beyond. Participation also means that the participants can propose themes and participate in the outcomes and positions. This enriches the debate. Participation also means that Christians should be encouraged to engage in promoting a Europe as its citizens and to be open to create new networks.

A place to share spirituality and to share life together

The event is a place of encounter and of sharing different spiritual paths and the experiences that we hold in common. Reading and studying the Bible together, praying and singing will form a central place at the gathering. At the same time, we are seeking new forms of spirituality that we can share together.

A transnational place of dialogue and networking

The burning questions of our time, such as, the future of Europe or the future of ecumenism need spaces where we can exchange perspectives, based on diversity and mutual respect, as well as where solutions for the future that we share in the public square can be developed. It is particularly important that the various Christian traditions and perspectives on Europe are brought together.

A festival of art and culture

We meet each other not only with words, but through music, theatre, and art as well as with a wealth of the cultural life of our churches and organizations. There will furthermore also be space for new art and culture and new forms of artistic and cultural engagement.

Welcome to Europe!

The Board of the European Christian Convention, December 2017