



General Assembly Virtual - 13 June 2024
Agenda Item: 4
Document Name: V-GA2024_DOC3 2023 ANNUAL REPORT
Purpose: For Information

Conference of European Churches 2023 Annual Report

Dialogue with the European Political Institutions

Dialogue and advocacy on a European level is an important part of the mission of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). This area of work brings the concerns of CEC's membership to the European Union and the Council of Europe, and follows and analyses the activity of European political institutions. CEC works with its membership to develop European church positions on important issues, and provides an opportunity for churches to engage directly with these bodies.

Open, regular, and transparent [dialogue between churches and the European Union](#) takes place in accordance with Article 17 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union. CEC cooperates with the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) and others.

In 2023, CEC brought the [impact of the war in Ukraine](#) on the European way of life to the table of high-level meetings of religious leaders at European Commission in Brussels

The former CEC General Secretary Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen highlighted the importance and relevance of [dialogue from a Christian perspective](#) at the Annual EPP Group Intercultural Dialogue with churches and religious institutions in Santiago De Compostela, Spain.

CEC and COMECE held a joint prayer for peace and Christian unity at the European Parliament.

In light of the Swedish EU Presidency, an [ecumenical delegation](#) representing CEC and COMECE, met with Swedish Minister for Social Affairs and Public Health, Jakob Forssmed, to discuss the implementation of the Swedish Presidency at the Council of the EU. The delegation expressed its concerns, conveying full support for a continued and concrete humanitarian, political and financial EU solidarity with Ukraine.

CEC contributed to the European Parliament's dialogue on liberal democracy and was represented at the European Parliament's seminar on Dialogue on Liberal Democracy by Marietta D.C. van der Tol, who contributed her perspectives, arguing the [important role of churches and religion](#).

To mark the International Day of Democracy, CEC participated in the Council of Europe event in Strasbourg, engaging with the European civil society actors. The event featured an exchange with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Marija Pejcinovic Buric, on [peace and democracy](#).



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[Response to conflict from churches and religious communities](#) were the focus at the EPP Working Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue meeting during the visit of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to Vilnius. At the meeting, former CEC General Secretary introduced the Pathways to Peace initiative focusing on Ukraine, promoting justice, reconciliation and peace.

The relevance of [Christian values for the European Union](#), especially in the context of the upcoming European elections in June 2024, was discussed by EU officials, representatives of church organisations and Catholic NGOs working with the EU, in a meeting in Brussels. The meeting was organised by CEC, COMECE and the Interparliamentary Assembly On Orthodoxy.

Pathways to Peace

[CEC organised a hybrid panel in Lviv](#), Ukraine, where participants explored how churches could build just peace in Ukraine. The panel was organised as part of its Pathways to Peace initiative, in close cooperation with the Institute of Ecumenical Studies of the Ukrainian Catholic University and the International Forum 16th Ecumenical Social Week.

[CEC welcomed the Orthodox Church of Ukraine](#) (OCU) as its full member by the end of summer, completing a process required by the CEC constitution. CEC President Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain conveyed delight in his letter to Metropolitan Yevstratiy of Bila Tservka, saying "It is our joy to welcome you and embrace you in Christian love."

CEC joined churches and ecumenical organisations from across the globe at the [Ukraine Future Conference in Budapest](#), organised by the Reformed Church in Hungary and the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia, affirming hopes that peace with justice is possible.

A CEC webinar generated an honest exchange about the war in Ukraine. Organised together with Inclusive Peace, the webinar explored "[The role of faith-based actors in political processes](#) – comparative experiences and implications regarding Ukraine and Russia."

Seventeen general secretaries of the National Councils of Churches in Europe gathered in Brussels, in a meeting hosted by CEC. Together they engaged in [dialogue about just peace](#) in the region, and the role of churches in European societies. The heads of NCCs also discussed in detail the work of CEC on public theology and advocacy within the EU Institutions. The meeting included CEC's Pathways to Peace initiative from different geographical and ecclesial perspectives.

Amid heightened tensions and conflicts in Europe and beyond, panellists in a webinar organised by CEC brought into focus the need [for safety and security for religious communities and the protection of worship places](#) that are under attack. The webinar was as part of CEC's Pathways to Peace initiative,



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also marking the 10th Anniversary of the Summer School on Human Rights.

CEC contributed to the discussion on religious freedom held at the [Third Ecumenical Report on religious freedom worldwide](#) - a Christian focus on a special human right published by the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) and the German Bishops' Conference in Brussels.

[CEC and the WCC expressed grave concern](#) to the European Union on the situation in the Caucasus bringing about the exodus of almost the entire ethnic Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh.

A CEC webinar highlighted the [protection of worship places and cultural heritage sites in Europe](#). Speakers shared examples from Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) and Kosovo (1244).

Economic and Ecological Justice

The assembly of the [European Christian Environmental Network](#) (ECEN) underlined the commitment of churches in caring for creation and the protection of the planet. The 2023 ECEN Assembly was held in Roskilde, Denmark, and was hosted by the local churches.

In a joint message, Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain, president of CEC, and Archbishop Gintaras Grušas, president of CCEE invited Christians in the churches, parishes, communities, and persons of goodwill across Europe to observe the [Season of Creation](#) in an ecumenical spirit.

ECEN participated in the "[Beyond Growth](#) 2023 Conference: Pathways towards Sustainable Prosperity in the EU" a meeting held at the European Parliament in Brussels.

The book [Every Part of Creation Matters](#) was launched. The book, published by CEC in partnership with Globethics.net, explores how caring for God's creation is an integral part of the calling of the churches. The book is edited by Kees Nieuwerth, Peter Pavlovic and Adrian Shaw and features insights into the European Green Deal, sharing analysis and raising concerns.

Ecclesiology and Mission

A Working Group comprised of CEC and CCEE representatives met several times throughout the year to revise the ecumenical [Charta Ecumenica](#) document, a joint CEC and CCEE document. The aim of the working group is to revise the current *Charta Ecumenica*, and to update areas that require modification



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given the current changing circumstances in European society, as well as among Christians. The goal is to ensure that the document remains relevant in the current context.

The finalised revision, in which there is also the proposed continental meeting of the European Ecumenical Assembly, is to be confirmed by 2025 and made ready and available for distribution by the time of the Charta's 25th Anniversary in 2026.

To mark Pentecost, while keeping in mind the impact of war in Ukraine, and the horrific physical, material and spiritual suffering, Rev. Christian Krieger and H.E. Mgr. Mariano Crociata, respectively former presidents of CEC and COMECE, issued [a joint message calling for prayers and peace](#).

The [2023 Easter message](#) highlighted Christ's restoration and its message of hope. "In a world marred by conflict, where we strive for peace, Christ's resurrection brightens our hope."

A [Global Peace Prayer](#) drew hundreds of Christians from Europe and beyond to pray and advocate for peace. The online prayer was jointly organised by CEC, the Lutheran World Federation, the Baptist World Alliance, the Mennonite World Conference, World Methodist Council, World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the World Council of Churches.

Thirty-two [ecumenical officers and representatives of CEC Member Churches](#) from across Europe met in Brussels, where they explored the role of the churches and public theology—and how CEC's programmes can strengthen that role in the future. Among their concerns was the shrinking space given to religion in public discourse—a concern that makes CEC's position even more valuable.

The 2023 CEC Christmas greetings addressed the theme ["May we make peace!"](#)

2023 CEC General Assembly

CEC held its General Assembly from 14 – 20 June 2023 in Tallinn, Estonia, exploring the theme "Under God's blessing – shaping the future". The Assembly was hosted by CEC Member Churches in Estonia, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church of Estonia.

The Assembly brought together participants representing CEC Member Churches, Organisations in Partnership and European National Councils of Churches. The CEC Assembly was a significant moment of prayer, fellowship and reflection for the life and witness of churches in Europe. The theme bound the churches together in an ecumenical spirit.

The Youth Assembly in Tallinn brought fresh hope for unity. The young participants of the assembly



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took part in an event dedicated to ecumenical learning and formation. The stewards of the assembly also took part in the event and later played a significant role in organising the assembly.

CEC General Assembly participants were welcomed by Tallinn's Mayor. He said, "Our doors and souls are open". The CEC Assembly came to Estonia affirming ecumenical bonds.

Among the keynote speakers were [Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya](#), who called the churches to pray and act to end conflicts and guard freedom; [Hartmut Rosa](#), who reflected on how churches can offer a different model to Europe's desire for permanent growth; Former [Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams](#), who spoke about the meaning of blessings, and the [Ecumenical Patriarch](#), who explored how a Christian Europe can allow all voices to be heard. The CEC leadership, including CEC president and general secretary, presented official reports to the Assembly, highlighting CEC's Pathways to Peace initiative.

Two hearing sessions were held on [Ukraine](#), where church leaders from Ukraine highlighted the situation of their churches, how they are witnessing to the gospel and struggles for peace.

The assembly elected [new leaders and members of the Governing Board](#). H.E. Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain of the Ecumenical Patriarchate was elected as president; and Rt Rev. Dr Dagmar Winter from the Church of England and Rev. Frank Kopania from EKD as vice presidents.

Over 300 participants representing CEC Member Churches from across Europe issued an [assembly message](#), inspiring church fellowship. "Churches engaged in shaping the future of Europe must be imaginative and brave, confident not arrogant, listening not just speaking, trusting not anxious, hopeful not merely optimistic," read the message.

Estonian Convention Bureau, together with the City of Tallinn, nominated the Assembly as an inspiring and successful event. Former CEC Assembly Coordinator Triin Käpp and Assembly Assistant Eleri Soidla received the honour in Tallinn on behalf of CEC.

Safer and Stronger Communities in Europe (SASCE)

CEC assisted in the protection of places of worship in Europe together with the European Jewish Congress' (EJC) Security and Crisis Centre (SACC), Faith Matters and the European Buddhist Union, and funded by the European Commission. The outcome of this interfaith partnership, representing Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities across Europe, is the [SASCE project](#). SASCE carried out activities to increase security in and around places of worship. The four organisations developed tools to strengthen security awareness and crisis management.

SASCE organised various events in Spain, focusing on crisis management and security, especially given the recent attacks on churches in the country.



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CEC conducted a series of trainings and briefings, and organised a [faith conference](#) in Los Rubios. SASCE training on security awareness and crisis management was carried out on behalf of CEC Member Churches in Estonia and Croatia. In Estonia, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Estonia received the material in the Estonian language as well as the training and briefing for the church leadership, staff and worshippers. The guides were presented to the Estonian church leaders.

A hybrid conference, briefings and trainings on [security awareness and crisis management in Europe](#) took place in Madrid. They were hosted by the Spanish Evangelical Church in Madrid and its President Rev. Alfredo Abad Heras. These events were held as part of SASCE, carried out by CEC, together with European religious partners, and funded by the Internal Police Fund of the European Commission.

SASCE was implemented across 15 European countries, including Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

SASCE was presented at the [International Conference on Religion and Freedom of Expression](#) in Lisbon, organised by the International Association for the Defense of Religious Freedom.

SASCE was furthermore presented at [United Nations Society](#) of Aristotle University in Thessaloniki.

Human rights

CEC published its book [Alternatives to Populism from a Human Rights Perspective](#). Edited by CEC Programme Officer Dr Elizabeta Kitanovic, Rev. Dr Patrick Roger Schnabel and Sofia Caseiro, and produced in partnership with Globethics, the book explores populism from various perspectives, discussing religion and political actors in a compilation of essays authored by academics.

In a joint letter to the European Union, CEC and the WCC urged the [lifting of the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh and the reopening of the Lachin corridor](#).

The CEC-CCEE Joint Committee issued a [declaration on the situation in the Middle East](#) calling for prayers and action for just peace and an end to the ongoing violence in the region.

Youth

CEC engaged with youth networks while supporting their activities. The European Commission declared 2022 as the European Year of Youth. On this occasion, the Conference of European Churches,



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together with the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) and the World Student Christian Federation - Europe region (WSCF-Europe), [published reflections from Christian youth in Europe](#) on the importance and needs of ecumenical organisations. In a year marred by war, inflation, anxiety and the effects of multiple crises, they shared about their personal sources of strength.

Communications

Around thirty communication team members from Member Churches and partners of CEC gathered in Tallinn to report on the CEC General Assembly, promoting the theme “Under God’s blessing – shaping the future”. The diverse team, assembled by CEC, was comprised of news writers, video producers, photographers, experts in media relations and stewards, and these were seconded by the European churches. Each day, they disseminated information, telling stories from the assembly.

An [Assembly Handbook](#) was published inviting CEC Member Churches and partners to prepare for the upcoming CEC General Assembly, providing practical information and details about the assembly. CEC published a 5-year report titled *Churches Shaping Europe’s Future—CEC’s Journey from Novi Sad to Tallinn: 2018-2023*. The report maps CEC’s accomplishments and challenges in its work.

The [new CEC logo](#) was launched. It embraces traditional Christian symbolism with a modern flair. The logo—which was officially launched at the 2023 CEC General Assembly in Tallinn in June—was commissioned by the CEC Assembly Planning Committee and designed by Greek theologian and artist Nikos Kosmidis. The CEC Governing Board approved the logo in November 2022.

CEC launched a new [website](#), offering a fast, mobile-friendly, and accessible online experience for visitors seeking news, information, resources, and networking opportunities within the European church fellowship. The new website is a home for the European church fellowship’s online communication, which tells the stories of CEC and its work, and invites visitors to engage.

Launched with a new design and logo, the website’s editing system has been changed to ensure efficient publishing and includes enhanced security against hacking threats.

Finances

[CEC continued to receive valuable support from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the Protestant Church in Germany, Church of Norway and Church of Sweden.](#)



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CEC also thanks other churches and partners who provided vital support for individual projects or infrastructure.

These included: Foundation for Hope & Prosperity, Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Protestant Church in Switzerland, Bremgarten-Mustschellen parish of the Reformed Church in Switzerland, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Braunschweig, Evangelical Church of Westphalia.

CEC Member Churches, individuals, congregations, parishes, church-related organisations and foundations walk together to bring a prophetic voice and a sense of unity making a difference in European people's lives.