



Five good wishes for the future of Europe

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) on the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome

On 25 March 2007 the European Union celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome as an important step towards the political unification of Europe. In 1957 the signatory states committed themselves to ‘laying the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe’, to ‘ensure the economic and social progress of their countries by common action’ and ‘to preserve and strengthen peace and liberty’ (from the Preamble to the EEC treaty).

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) regards the development of the European Union as an important contribution to peace, freedom and prosperity in Europe. 50 years after the Treaty of Rome the vision of a free and united Europe has been realized to a degree that seemed unthinkable to most people 50 years ago. The European Union has grown to consist of 27 member states. In 1989 people in the former Communist states overcame the Iron Curtain and thus created the foundations for the European Union today also to embrace large areas of Central and Eastern Europe. In many regions today the European Union forms the world’s leading economic sphere.

The Protestant churches in Europe are grateful for what has been achieved. But at the same time, the churches are also turning their gaze towards the future. The churches therefore want to send the European Union five ‘good wishes’ for the coming 50 years, ‘good wishes’ for a Europe of the future.

1. Good wish: Europe must continue to grow together

Europe is greater than the EU. The Protestant churches in Europe are experiencing this day by day in their church fellowship, which extends far beyond the boundaries of the EU. The states of the Western Balkans need a perspective for acceptance into the EU which contributes towards creating peace in this region of Europe also. The EU's neighbour states need a policy which promotes growing together in Europe and prevents new conflicts.

2. Good wish: The European Union needs more democracy

Fellowship within the European states must be deepened. So one of the great challenges is to develop the Europe of governments into a Europe of the people. This includes strengthening the possibilities of democratic participation by citizens in the EU and a legal foundation which puts the collaboration of the states of Europe on the basis of a common constitutional law. On 9 May 2005 in a statement on the EU Constitutional Treaty the CPCE Presidium made it clear that despite some points of criticism, from the Protestant perspective the Constitutional Treaty represents a considerably improved foundation for the co-existence of people and states in Europe.

3. Good wish: The European Union needs more justice

Despite all the economic successes, almost 80 million people in the EU are still living on the poverty line, and one child in five is threatened by poverty. More than 17 million people in the EU are unemployed.¹ The divide between poor and rich is getting wider and wider in many European countries. The Protestant churches in Europe want a European Union which brings its economic and social policies into a balance which is mutually supportive and which fights poverty and social demarcation in Europe more strongly than hitherto.

4. Good wish: The European Union needs more openness

The EU needs a policy which keeps open the possibilities of life for future generations. This applies not only to environmental and development policies but to all spheres of policy, all of which must be implemented in a more sustained way. Given the demographic development in Europe, new forms of compatibility of family

¹ European Commission and European Council. Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007.

life and working life and a reordering of relations between the generations are needed here.

By comparison with the poor countries of the world, the EU is on the one hand the greatest financial contributor to development work, but at the same time, with the demarcation of its markets and its trade policy, it makes the greatest contribution to economic imbalance and poverty in the world. The Protestant churches in Europe want a European Union which does not seal itself off from the outside world but also contributes towards more peace and justice in the world in the present processes of globalization, e.g. in the frontier regions of Europe in the Middle East and in North Africa.

5. Good wish: The European Union needs a viable cultural identity

The European Union will be able to develop peace, freedom and prosperity further only if it can rely on a common basis of human values. Christian faith is one of the roots which has shaped Europe and will continue to shape it. For the churches of the Reformation, which have emerged from a movement of religious freedom, responsible treatment of freedom is a special element here. The churches support dialogue between different religions and cultures and also conversation with those who have no religious confession. It is the common task of all to contribute towards building up a peaceful and just society through dialogue. That applies especially where there are conflicts and differences of opinion.

‘Unity in reconciled diversity’: the contribution of the Protestant churches to the future of Europe

In the *Charta Oecumenica* the Protestant churches have committed themselves to promoting the union of the European continent. The churches can introduce their special proximity to places and peoples here. This includes their special concern for minorities and the socially outcast, since they know the dangers of the pressure towards assimilation and therefore support an integrative society which accords minorities corresponding rights and possibilities. For the Protestant churches it is part of their Reformation competence to criticize institutions which become too far removed from ordinary men and women.

The Protestant churches can introduce to Europe the model of ‘unity in reconciled diversity’. From a history of centuries of repudiation and rejection a community of churches has come into being which has found its way towards reconciliation. The Protestant churches can and want to contribute to the future of Europe with the experiences of this way of reconciliation.

Vienna, 20 March 2007

The CPCE Presidium

Council President Thomas Wipf, Berne

Oberkirchenrätin Dr. Stephanie Dietrich, Oslo

Prof Dr. Michael Beintker, Münster

At present 105 Protestant churches in Europe (including five South-American churches originating from Europe) belong to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist along with pre-Reformation churches such as Hussites and Czech Brethren grant each other pulpit and table fellowship on the basis of the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973. A 13-member Council carries out ongoing business between two general assemblies, headed by a 3-member Presidium: Revd Thomas Wipf (President), Council President of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches in Bern , Prof. Michael Beintker (Co-President), Director of the Seminary for Reformed Theology at the University in Munster , and Revd Dr. Stephanie Dietrich (Co-President), Church of Norway . The Secretariat, which operates under the direction of the Council, is housed in the Severin-Schreiber-Gasse 3, A-1180 Vienna, office@leuenberg.eu, tel. +43.1.4791523.900, fax .580. Its director is OKR Prof. Dr. Michael Bünker. The CPCE press officer is Dipl.theol. Thomas Flügge (Bern), tel. +41.31.3702502, t.fluegge@leuenberg.eu.