



# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

SHAPING THE FUTURE:  
**PATHWAYS TO PEACE**



# Table of contents

INTRODUCTION   H. E. Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain / CEC President .....	3
PATHWAYS TO PEACE .....	4
GATHERINGS DEEPEN DIALOGUE .....	7
MESSAGES EXPRESSING CONCERN .....	10
WEBINARS GENERATE HONEST EXCHANGES .....	11
2023 CEC GENERAL ASSEMBLY .....	13
KEYNOTE SPEAKERS AT THE ASSEMBLY .....	16
CEC RELEASES ASSEMBLY MESSAGE .....	19
DIALOGUE WITH THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS .....	24
ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE .....	29
ECCLESIOLOGY AND MISION .....	31
SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE .....	35
HUMAN RIGHTS .....	38
YOUTH .....	41
COMMUNICATIONS .....	43
FINANCES .....	47
MEMBER CHURCHES .....	49
NATIONAL COUNCILS OF CHURCHES .....	55
ORGANISATIONS IN PARTNERSHIP .....	58
STAFF.....	60
CONTACT .....	61

# Introduction



As we look back on 2023, the Conference of European Churches (CEC) saw moments of challenge as well as lights of great hope. Undergirding these challenges and hopes—as well as most of our programmatic work in 2023—are the Pathways to Peace initiative, through which we spoke out against the Russian invasion of Ukraine in a strong church voice, and the CEC Assembly in Tallinn, Estonia, at which we came together to pray, speak, and act. You will read more about both in this Annual Report, as well as many other CEC initiatives and accomplishments.

CEC continued to prioritise dialogue with the European political institutions, economic and ecological justice, prayers and messages marking

our most important Christian seasons, safer and stronger communities in Europe, youth engagement, and communications.

As we already make our way well into 2024, may we continue to live with the realization that we are, as our assembly theme stated, “Under God’s blessing—shaping the future.”

**H. E. Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain**  
CEC President



**PATHWAYS TO PEACE**



# Pathways to Peace



The CEC Pathways to Peace initiative focuses on the war in Ukraine, following the country's invasion by Russia in 2022, by promoting justice, reconciliation, and peace.

It is a coordinated response of the European church fellowship. The initiative strengthens the synergy among churches and partners. Implementing a variety of events and projects, Pathways to Peace enhances the ecumenical vision of just peace by facilitating exchanges among European churches and promoting the voices of Ukrainian churches in the ecumenical debate.

It engages in dialogue with European Institutions, addressing crucial political concerns, and advocating for the protection of destroyed religious sites in Ukraine.

Pathways to Peace is inspired by CEC's legacy as a conference that was founded in 1959 as a peacebuilding organisation following the death and destruction of World War II. We continue to honour these earliest roots through an ongoing commitment to peacebuilding and reconciliation.

In 2023, CEC and its member churches lived into many facets of Pathways to Peace.

## **Orthodox Church of Ukraine a full CEC member**

CEC welcomed the Orthodox Church of Ukraine as its full member by the end of summer 2023, completing a process required by the CEC constitution. CEC President Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great

Britain conveyed delight in his letter to Metropolitan Yevstraty of Bila Tservka, saying “It is our joy to welcome you and embrace you in Christian love.”

“The war in Ukraine has shown us how fragile peace is and how important it is to establish human and Christian fellowship,” said CEC former president Rev. Christian Krieger. “I am proud that CEC is the first international body to establish such a strong link with Ukraine, thereby helping to write a European story of this country in this particularly tragic situation.”

Krieger expressed his gratitude to the CEC Member Churches, who supported the admission of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine into the ecumenical fellowship. “This is the very moment for us to demonstrate Christian unity so that we can build peace together.”

**“I AM PROUD THAT CEC IS THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL BODY TO ESTABLISH SUCH A STRONG LINK WITH UKRAINE.”**

**“IT IS OUR JOY TO WELCOME YOU AND EMBRACE YOU IN CHRISTIAN LOVE.”**



# Gatherings deepen dialogue

## National Councils of Churches engage in dialogue

Seventeen general secretaries of the National Councils of Churches in Europe gathered in Brussels in March 2023, 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. They 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.

"Public theology should be about engaging government institutions with practical programmes," said Bishop Mike Royal, General Secretary of Churches Together in England. "The church may serve as [a] warm welcome hub, especially for those faced with crisis stemming from the high cost of living."

**"THE CHURCH MAY SERVE AS [A] WARM WELCOME HUB, ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE FACED WITH CRISIS STEMMING FROM THE HIGH COST OF LIVING."**



## Ukraine Future Conference explores the role of Christians

CEC joined churches and ecumenical organisations from across the globe in July 2023 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.

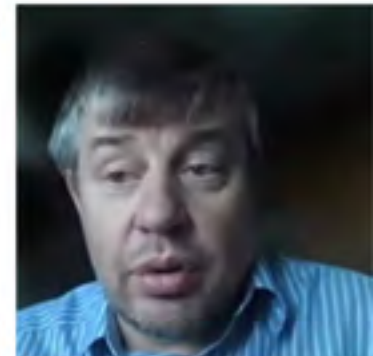
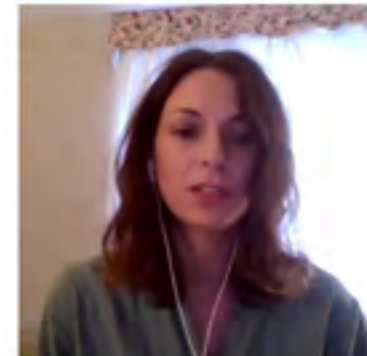
“The future of Europe is connected to the future of Ukraine,” said Bishop Sándor Zán Fábián of the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia. Reflecting on the future of Ukraine, he emphasised the individual and collective role of Christians, who believe in Christ the Saviour. “The future of Ukraine may be difficult, burdened with suffering and persecution, but it is promising because of our hope in Jesus, who defeated death, and made a promise to those who believe in him.”

## Churches strive to build just peace

In October 2023, 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.

Ms Helga Dyatlik of the United World Mission said that a prerequisite of just peace is for the perpetrators of violence to be held responsible, along with the Christian values of forgiveness. She emphasised that

**“THE FUTURE OF UKRAINE MAY BE DIFFICULT, BURDENED WITH SUFFERING AND PERSECUTION, BUT IT IS PROMISING BECAUSE OF OUR HOPE IN JESUS, WHO DEFEATED DEATH, AND MADE A PROMISE TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN HIM.”**





Russia must be held responsible for war crimes in Ukraine.

“For lasting peace, churches and Ukrainians must work towards reconciliation. There is a deep divide in Ukrainian society that needs to be bridged. Therefore, churches who want to support reconstruction must forge dialogue, overcoming denominational divisions,” she added.

**“CHURCHES WHO WANT  
TO SUPPORT RECONSTRUCTION  
MUST FORGE DIALOGUE,  
OVERCOMING DENOMINATIONAL  
DIVISIONS.”**



# Messages expressing concern



## Concerns expressed over the exodus of ethnic Armenians

CEC and the World Council of Churches (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 joint letter from CEC and the WCC was sent in October 2023 to Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, signed by Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen, CEC General Secretary 2019–2023, and WCC General Secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay.

“In light of the subsequent developments, especially the massive exodus of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, we appeal to the EU and to all members of the international community to provide immediate and sustained humanitarian support for the refugees, especially the most vulnerable and the poorer members of the community who still lack adequate assistance to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, and medical care, and for education for their children,” the letter stated.

# Webinars generate honest exchanges

## Churches cooperate in pursuit of peace

A CEC webinar in April 2023 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.”

Rev. Alan Donaldson, General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation, described “the efforts of Baptist churches [that] raised over \$1.2 million, which will be invested in rebuilding churches in Ukraine after the war.”

He also reflected that “the ecumenical cooperation with the Orthodox churches in the Ukraine has improved after the outbreak of war especially in the ministry of common humanitarian work.”



## How can we protect cultural heritage sites?

A CEC webinar in October 2023 highlighted the protection of worship places and cultural heritage sites in Europe. Speakers shared examples from Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), and Kosovo (UN Security Council Resolution 1244).

Prof. Dr Liudmyla Fylypovych from the Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine shared how the protection of religious buildings is a significant issue for Ukraine. “Since the beginning of the war, and especially with the time of the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, when active shelling, missile strikes, aerial bombardment, destruction of the material and human resources of Ukraine began, the issue of religious buildings escalated to the maximum.”

She said that “it is important not only to identify destroyed and damaged monuments but also to protect them legally, physically, financially, informatively and methodically.”

### Webinar stresses the need for the protection of worship places

Amid heightened tensions and conflicts in Europe and beyond, panelists 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, held in November 2023, was part of CEC’s Pathways to Peace initiative, also marking the 10th Anniversary of the Summer School on Human Rights.



**“IT IS IMPORTANT NOT ONLY TO IDENTIFY DESTROYED AND DAMAGED MONUMENTS BUT ALSO TO PROTECT THEM LEGALLY, PHYSICALLY, FINANCIALLY, INFORMATIVELY AND METHODICALLY.”**

Ms Iman Atta, CEO of Faith Matters UK, brought attention to the conflict in the Middle East and its impact on Europe. She reflected on “the bridges that have been recently broken among communities due to the anger and grief” triggered by the conflict. She stressed how anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and hate against Christian churches are a real threat in the current environment. “It is really important for us as religious communities to reach out to each other. Take small steps and ask what help is needed in order to make sure we are all safe and secure together.”



KULTUURKATTEL

**2023 CEC GENERAL ASSEMBLY**



# 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 took part in an event dedicated to ecumenical learning and formation. Sharing prayers, singing, and walking together, more than fifty young people readily expressed their hopes



**“UNDER GOD’S BLESSING –  
SHAPING THE FUTURE.”**



“Sometimes I hear about these gatherings but I’ve never been to one, so I’d like to see how they work,” said Blumenhagen. “I also want to make contacts and friendships, and I’ve been enjoying the city of Tallinn and its people.”

CEC General Assembly participants were welcomed by Mihhail Kõlvart Tallinn’s Mayor, who said, “Our doors and souls are open.” The CEC Assembly came to Estonia affirming ecumenical bonds.

The 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.

for unity and the future among European churches.

Nikoloz Gurgenidze, from the Church of Greece, expressed his hopes for the CEC assembly. “I would like to see divided Christians get together through theology and dialogue,” he said. “Real unity means real community.”

The stewards of the assembly also took part in the event and later played a significant role in organising it. For many of them, it was their first experience of this kind of gathering. Björn Peter Blumenhagen, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany, heard about the opportunity through a friend and took a short break from his studies in Protestant theology in Hamburg to attend the CEC assembly.



# Keynote speakers at the assembly

## “Pray for Belarussian people”

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya called the churches to pray and act to end conflicts and guard freedom. “Pray for those who suffer, pray for our political prisoners, pray for Belarussian people and their liberation from tyranny, pray for Ukrainian people, their freedom and safety.”

In 2020–2023, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya became a symbol of the peaceful struggle for democracy and strong female leadership. She spoke about the political situation in Belarus and the war in Ukraine, describing both of these situations as a conflict between brothers, with an aggressor twisting the notion of brotherhood to assert his dominance. “When empires speak of brotherhood, they tend to strangle lesser nations and countries in their ‘brotherly’ hugs,” she said.





## Can we stop the race to keep growing?

German sociologist Prof. Dr Hartmut Rosa reflected on how churches can offer a different model to Europe's desire for permanent growth.

Rosa said that European society is at a point of "breakneck standstill," in which life is focused on destructive growth to maintain the status quo. Giving the example of the food industry, he shared how enzymes are put into ready-made meals to curtail the feelings of fullness and satisfaction. "The problem is that we simply have to keep growing in all industries, because otherwise jobs could not be preserved, even if objectively it no longer makes sense to grow," Rosa said. "We live in a system that needs to grow to stay the same. Without that growth, the system breaks down."



## What blessing does the church of Christ bring?

Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams spoke about the meaning of blessings. He explored the question of what it means to be blessed, or fortunate – and how that question impacts the way churches relate to today's world.

He said: "Those who are not anxious about stockpiling their resources but acknowledge their dependence on mercy and gift; those who are hungry not for more security for themselves, but for a justice that is shared with all; those who are compassionate and without aggression, who are not afraid to be wounded, who labour for reconciliation – all these are people who have left behind the passion to be the possessors and managers of their destiny, people who know that it is only in relation to God, and to their brothers and sisters under God, that they will be fully human."



## Religious landscape has dramatically changed

The Ecumenical Patriarch explored how a Christian Europe in which religiosity is often perceived as being in the minority can allow all voices to be heard.

He discussed the purpose or goal of the ecumenical movement in this kind of Europe. "What role or responsibility does religion play in such a Europe?" he asked, describing a destructive "new ecumenism" that is in essence a force for division and destruction. "We see the consequences of this divisive and destructive mentality on full display in Russia's current brutal attack against Ukraine as well as in its church's justification for this war as the salvation of Ukraine from the alleged seduction of a godless, secular, and liberal West," he said.

## Assembly business proceeds

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.



# CEC releases assembly message

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,” the message reads.

*Christians from across Europe met in Tallinn, Estonia, for the 2023 General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches with the theme: Under God's Blessing – Shaping the Future. The assembly was reminded that to be blessed is to be freed from anxiety about our own security or control – liberated from imprisonment within our own history or narrative. It is this notion of blessing that guides the churches of CEC in their vocation in a conflicted world.*

*The keynote speakers reminded the churches that theology is public, that we Christians must embrace the challenge of contributing to an increasingly secularised political discourse. 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.*



*It is because of this vocation that churches, united in Christ and drawn by the biblical witness, are necessarily challenged about developments on European soil. This compels us to face the challenges of the climate crisis, loss of biodiversity, global migration, rising nationalism under a populist banner, challenges to human rights, broader conflicts and outright war. And all these phenomena feed into and from each other: for example, the eco-crisis damages food sustainability for populations which, as a result of conflict over diminishing access to resources, migrate to seek a better life. In this context, the assembly recognised its obligation under God to hear the appeal of young people whose future increasingly feels to have been betrayed by those who also were young once. We recognise our corporate responsibility for contributing to the eco-crisis and climate injustice*

**“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,”**

*which are tied inextricably with economies that seek limitless growth. God's creation cries out for different priorities.*



*This assembly has been clear about the following:*

- The assembly condemns unequivocally Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine and the devastation of life, territory and international relationships – the violent breakdown of the post-war settlement in which the rule of law was paramount. The assembly heard powerful witness by those directly affected and a strong appeal for prayer and practical accompaniment into the future. The assembly stands alongside victims of violence in this war.*
- We are concerned about the role of some churches in promoting this appalling conflict, and regret the impact of this divergence on Christian witness on the continent of Europe. While meeting in Tallinn a new chapter*

*in potential European conflict opened up: nuclear weapons were moved into Belarus where democracy and non-violent resistance itself has been suppressed under the current regime. We deeply regret this move.*

- The ongoing blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan continues to bring injustice and suffering to people who find themselves oppressed on account of their contested identity and territory.*
- Freedom of religion and belief is under serious threat in some parts of Europe – for example, Christian minorities under attack, sacred sites and places of religious heritage being destroyed, and lands being occupied.*
- The human cost of global migration, not least on the borders of Europe is enormous. While we met we were shocked to hear that nearly 500 people had drowned off the coast of Greece. CEC and CCME have called for a day of prayer and vigil on 25 June 2023.*

*Some of these issues are addressed by CEC under the framework of Pathways to Peace.*

*CEC was originally set up to create a space in which Europeans of diverse history, polity and ethnicity could meet together because of and despite differences of perspective and experience. That vocation continues to apply today – especially given current real and violent divisions in Europe. Christians are inevitably united in Christ, enriched by diversity, and are called to witness to that unity in expressing (in word and action) their concern for those without power, who suffer injustice at the hands of others. This also*



*means holding to account all who inflict injustice on others.*

*As some of the political movements of our age continue to withdraw behind the securities of borders and narrowly-defined identity, Christian churches do not have the luxury of walking apart from each other. Our conversations, rooted in mutual love and grace, must characterize our priorities in the years to come. Churches must heed the call of God in Jesus Christ to be agents of hope, prepared publicly to bear the scars of unjust suffering. This means holding out without fear the reconciling life of resurrection hope in*



*Christ who calls us to take responsibility, under God's blessing, for shaping the future.*





**DIALOGUE WITH THE EUROPEAN  
POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**



# Dialogue with the European political institutions

Dialogue and advocacy on a European level is an important part of CEC's mission. 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 the European Commission in Brussels

## What is the church's role in democracy?

In January 2023, 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. "We see the default lines move from religion vs secularism to anti-liberalism vs liberalism, we will need to reorient our perspective on religion, insofar as religious communities will be important societal partners in containing the threat from the anti-liberal right," she said.

## Introducing Pathways to Peace

Response to conflict from churches and religious communities was the focus at the EPP Working Group Intercultural and Religious Dialogue meeting during the visit of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to Vilnius in March 2023. At the meeting, the former CEC General Secretary introduced the Pathways to Peace initiative focusing on Ukraine, promoting justice, reconciliation, and peace. "The Bible teaches that love and peaceful coexistence among people are the keys to a fulfilling and Godly life," said the Ecumenical Patriarch, who also shared how the Bible "reminds us that our love for others is a reflection of our love for God, and that we cannot truly know Him without first demonstrating love and compassion towards our fellow human beings."

**"GREEN TRANSITION SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED WITHOUT LEAVING ANYONE BEHIND,"**

## Swedish presidency discussed

In light of the Swedish EU Presidency, an ecumenical delegation representing CEC and COMECE met with the Swedish Minister for Social Affairs and Public Health, Jakob Forssmed, in May 2023, 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. Concerning the European Green Deal: greater transparency, participation, joint decision-making, and public awareness among all relevant actors were highlighted as paramount. "Green transition should be implemented without leaving anyone behind," the ecumenical delegation highlighted.

## Prayers focus on peace, unity

CEC and COMECE held a joint prayer for peace and Christian unity at the European Parliament in June 2023. Prof. Tomáš Halík reflected on the beginnings of the church at Pentecost as a "sacrament of understanding" and the hermeneutical task of the church in the current moment. Halík stressed that the demand to do justice is made evident in "today's Calvary, Ukraine," where the world is witnessing bloodshed, and the betrayal of Christ in the actions of the Russian Orthodox Church. Only just peace, connected to truth and mercy can be a solution to the war, he said.

## Pre-election, CEC promotes Christian values

The relevance of Christian values for the European Union, especially in the context of the upcoming European elections in June 2023, was discussed by EU officials, representatives of church organisations and Catholic NGOs working with the EU, in a meeting in Brussels in May, was organised by CEC, COMECE and the Interparliamentary Assembly On Orthodoxy. “In a time of multiple crises and increased polarisation in European societies, it becomes apparent that prosperity and economic growth are not sufficient objectives for the Union,” said Ms Katerina Pekridou, CEC Programme Officer for Theology and Studies.



**“IN A TIME OF MULTIPLE CRISES AND INCREASED POLARISATION IN EUROPEAN SOCIETIES, IT BECOMES APPARENT THAT PROSPERITY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH ARE NOT SUFFICIENT OBJECTIVES FOR THE UNION,”**

## International Day of Democracy marked

To mark the International Day of Democracy in September 2023, 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 Pejčinović Burić, on peace and democracy.

## CEC nurtures intercultural dialogue

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 in December 2023 with churches and religious institutions in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. “A dialogue of

appreciation for what you do,” said Sørensen, “but also initiating an honest and critical dialogue when we see things moving in a direction that we as believers cannot accept, such as a direction of secular fanaticism, political self-righteousness, and ideological fundamentalism.”





**ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL  
JUSTICE**

# 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 September in Roskilde, Denmark, and was hosted by the local churches.

## Season of Creation observed

In a joint message in August 2023, 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.



## Book launch: Every Part of Creation Matters

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 in January 2023. Published by CEC in partnership with Globethics.net, it 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



# Ecclesiology and Mission



## Charta Oecumenica evolving

A Working Group comprised of CEC and CCEE representatives met several times throughout the year to revise the ecumenical Charta Oecumenica document, a joint CEC and CCEE document. The aim of the working group is to revise the current Charta Oecumenica, and to update areas that require modification 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 revised document, which will also include the proposed continental meeting of the European Ecumenical Assembly, is to be finalised by 2025 and made ready and available for distribution by the time of the Charta's 25th Anniversary in 2026.



## Introducing Pathways to Peace

In February 2023, 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. Plans for the CEC Pathways to Peace initiative were discussed.

“As churches, we give witness to radical hope, transcending the limits of the here and now,” reflected Dr Christine Schliesser, director of studies at the Ecumenical Center for Faith and Society of Fribourg University.



**“AS CHURCHES, WE GIVE WITNESS  
TO RADICAL HOPE, TRANSCENDING  
THE LIMITS OF THE HERE AND NOW,”**

“We do acknowledge the life-threatening gravity of war and death, yet we refuse to allow death to have the final verdict on us. Even within war, we give witness to the victory of resurrection over death.”

## Global Peace Prayer draws hundreds

A Global Peace Prayer in March 2023 drew hundreds of Christians from Europe and beyond to pray and advocate for peace. The online prayer was jointly organised by CEC, Lutheran World Federation, Baptist World Alliance, Mennonite World Conference, World Methodist Council, World Communion of Reformed Churches, and World Council of Churches.

Rev. Yulia Starodubet, from the Methodist Church of Ukraine, described the many emotions those in Ukraine have felt since the Russian invasion: anger, sadness, and depression. “But God helped us in this situation and changed our emotions to hope, desire to stay strong, and resilience,” she said. “We make it because the world is on our side.”

## Easter message is one of hope

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,” the message reads.

## Joint message marks Pentecost

To mark Pentecost, in May 2023, 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.

## Christmas greetings address peace

The 2023 CEC Christmas greetings addressed the theme “May we make peace!”



A blue banner for the Global Peace Prayer 2023 event. On the left is a white dove in flight, holding an olive branch. To the right of the dove, the text reads: "Global Peace Prayer 2023: 22 March at 15:00 CET". Below this, it says "Registration link:" followed by the URL "https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\_RLdEJVkiSAqxIsNf5RFn5g". At the bottom of the banner, there is a row of logos for the participating organizations: CEC, LWF, COMECE, Baptist World Alliance, World Communion of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches, and Mennonite World Conference.



**UNSOC - AUTH**  
United Nations Society  
Aristotelian University of  
Thessaloniki

**SAFER AND STRONGER  
COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE**

United Nations  
Society  
Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki

# Safer and Stronger Communities in Europe (SASCE)

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



## Security and safety in Spain

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

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 several 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 the United Nations Society of Aristotle University in Thessaloniki.



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**HUMAN RIGHTS**

# Exploring alternatives to populism

In October 2023, 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.

“Our faith calls us to serve all people, regardless of whether they share it or not. Our churches are diaconical, not only in social work but also in their public mission,” reads the note from editors. “To speak out for human rights in general and freedom of religion or belief in particular is part of that public mission. By laying before you, our readers, this collection of essays, we do hope to contribute to this common aim of all who share the European ideals.”

**“OUR FAITH CALLS US TO SERVE ALL PEOPLE, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY SHARE IT OR NOT. OUR CHURCHES ARE DIACONICAL, NOT ONLY IN SOCIAL WORK BUT ALSO IN THEIR PUBLIC MISSION,”**



## Joint letter urges lifting the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh

In a joint letter in August 2023 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. “The humanitarian crisis in the blockaded enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) is escalating into tragic levels of experiences with the prolonged deprivations and sufferings of civilians,” reads the letter. “We are, thus, prompted to stress the urgency of finding solutions to the ongoing crisis.”







**YOUTH**



# Room for reflections

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, 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.

In February 2023, CEC published their reflections. Renate Japenga from the Netherlands speaks about her calling to love God and her neighbour. “I participate in international ecumenical programs because I want to learn about the struggles of my neighbours in the worldwide church and outside,” she says.

**“I PARTICIPATE IN INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL PROGRAMS BECAUSE I WANT TO LEARN ABOUT THE STRUGGLES OF MY NEIGHBOURS IN THE WORLDWIDE CHURCH AND OUTSIDE,”**





**COMMUNICATIONS**

# Communicators capture assembly energy

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.

“It’s a pleasure working with such talented communicators,” said Naveen Qayyum, CEC Communication Officer. “They have their hands on the pulse of the church. Inspired by the CEC Assembly theme, they have highlighted important topics that concern European churches. Our communications team manifests the beautiful diversity of [the] church fellowship that is CEC.”



## Assembly Handbook published

An Assembly Handbook was published, inviting CEC Member Churches and partners to prepare for the upcoming CEC General Assembly and providing practical information and details about the assembly.

## Five-year report maps accomplishments and challenges

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 the challenges it faced in its work.

## New CEC logo unveiled

The new CEC logo was launched in February 2023. It embraces traditional Christian symbolism with a modern flair. The logo, 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.

As a Greek artist with an extensive background in theology, Kosmidis drew ideas for the logo's colours from both ancient Armenian and Byzantine manuscripts and Gothic cathedrals. "East and west, west and east," he said, describing the global sources from which he drew.



## New website: fast, mobile-friendly, accessible

CEC launched a new website in March 2023, 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.

“This is a significant step forward in making the life and work of CEC more visible and accessible to our Member Churches, National Councils of Churches, Organisations in partnership, and everyone interested in following CEC,” said CEC General Secretary Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen.

### **Pathways to Peace video series**

CEC Communications started to produce a series of interviews with church figures related to CEC, representing churches and ecumenical organisations from Ukraine and beyond. They reflect on the reality of war, peacebuilding, and finding hope from a Christian perspective.





**FINANCES**

# Finances



The Conference of European Churches is grateful to its Member Churches, which year after year secure the work of CEC with financial backing in the form of membership contributions. Without this concrete sign of dedication and commitment to common witness, theological dialogue and the work for peace and reconciliation, there would be no Conference of European Churches.

In addition to annual membership funds, CEC Assembly was graciously hosted by the Member Churches in Estonia, including the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church of Estonia, together with the City of Tallinn authorities. Churches and ecumenical organisations from across Europe sponsored co-opted staff and stewards for the CEC General Assembly.

The SASCE project carried out by CEC and the European religious partners, was funded by the Internal Police Fund of the European Commission, which concluded last year.

Through the generous support of Member Churches, individuals, congregations and parishes, and church-related organisations and foundations combined, CEC was able to implement plans and projects in 2023 that would have otherwise been impossible.

In total, CEC's asset and liability balance in the year 2023 amounted to 2 329 461 €.

CEC appreciates the ongoing and prayerful support of Member Churches and other organisations.





**CEC MEMBER CHURCHES**

# CEC Member Churches

## **Albania**

Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania

## **Armenia**

Armenian Apostolic Church

## **Austria**

Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria

Evangelical Church H.C. in Austria

Old-Catholic Church of Austria

United Methodist Church in Austria

## **Belgium**

United Protestant Church in Belgium

## **Bulgaria**

Pentecostal Assemblies of Bulgaria

Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Bulgaria

## **Croatia**

Baptist Union of Croatia

Church of God in Croatia

Evangelical Church in the Republic of Croatia

Evangelical Pentecostal Church in Croatia

Reformed Christian (Calvinist) Church in Croatia

## **Cyprus**

Church of Cyprus

## **Czech Republic**

Czechoslovak Hussite Church

Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren

Old-Catholic Church in the Czech Republic

Orthodox Church in the Czech Lands and Slovakia

Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Czech Republic

United Methodist Church in the Czech Republic

## **Denmark**

Baptist Union of Denmark

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

# CEC Member Churches

## **Estonia**

Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Orthodox Church of Estonia

## **Finland**

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland  
Orthodox Church of Finland

## **France**

Federation of Evangelical Baptist Churches of France  
Malagasy Protestant Church in France  
Union of Protestant Churches in Alsace and Lorraine  
United Protestant Church of France

## **Georgia**

Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia

## **Germany**

Catholic Diocese of the Old-Catholics in Germany  
Protestant Church in Germany  
Union of Evangelical Free Churches in Germany (Baptist Union)  
United Methodist Church in Germany

## **Greece**

Church of Greece  
Evangelical Church of Greece

## **Hungary**

Baptist Union of Hungary  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary  
Reformed Church in Hungary  
United Methodist Church in Hungary

## **Iceland**

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland

## **Ireland**

Church of Ireland  
Methodist Church in Ireland  
Presbyterian Church in Ireland  
Salvation Army – UK and Ireland Territory

# CEC Member Churches

## Italy

Christian Evangelical Baptist Union of Italy  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy  
Evangelical Methodist Church in Italy  
Waldensian Church in Italy

## Latvia

Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Latvia  
Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad

## Liechtenstein

Evangelical Church in the Principality of Liechtenstein

## Lithuania

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lithuania

## Luxembourg

Protestant Churches in Luxembourg

## Netherlands

Mennonite Church in the Netherlands  
Old-Catholic Church of the Netherlands  
Protestant Church in the Netherlands  
Remonstrant Church

## North Macedonia

United Methodist Church Macedonia

## Norway

Church of Norway kirken.no

## Poland

Baptist Union of Poland  
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland  
Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland  
Old-Catholic Mariavite Church in Poland  
Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church  
Polish Catholic Church (Old-Catholic)  
United Methodist Church in Poland

# CEC Member Churches

## Portugal

Evangelical Methodist Church in Portugal  
Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Portugal  
Lusitanian Catholic Apostolic Evangelical Church

## Romania

Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania  
Reformed Church in Romania (Kiralyhagomellek District)  
Romanian Orthodox Church  
Transylvanian Reformed Church

## Russia

Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Russia  
Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia  
The Russian Orthodox Church (suspended its membership in 2009)

## Serbia

Reformed Christian Church in Serbia  
Serbian Orthodox Church  
Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia  
United Methodist Church in Serbia

## Slovakia

Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia  
Orthodox Church in the Czech Lands and Slovakia  
Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia

## Slovenia

Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Republic of Slovenia

## Spain

Spanish Evangelical Church  
Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church

## Sweden

Church of Sweden  
Uniting Church in Sweden

## Switzerland

Protestant Church in Switzerland  
Old-Catholic Church of Switzerland  
United Methodist Church in Switzerland

# CEC Member Churches

## Ukraine

Reformed Church in Transcarpathia  
Orthodox Church of Ukraine

## United Kingdom

Baptist Union of Great Britain  
Church in Wales  
Church of England  
Church of Scotland  
Church of Ireland  
Congregational Federation Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches  
Methodist Church in Britain Methodist Church in Ireland  
Presbyterian Church of Wales Salvation Army – UK and Ireland Territory  
The Scottish Episcopal Church  
Shiloh United Church of Christ Apostolic Worldwide  
United Reformed Church

## International Areas

Ecumenical Patriarchate  
European Baptist Federation Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Russia and Other States Moravian Church – European Continental Province  
Salvation Army – International Headquarters  
United Methodist Church – Nordic & Baltic Area



**NATIONAL COUNCILS OF CHURCHES**

# National Councils of Churches

## **Austria**

Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria

## **Belgium**

Consultation of Christian Churches in Belgium

## **Czech Republic**

Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Czech Republic

## **Denmark**

National Council of Churches in Denmark

## **Estonia**

Estonian Council of Churches

## **Finland**

Finnish Ecumenical Council

## **France**

French Protestant Federation

## **Germany**

Council of Christian Churches in Germany

## **Hungary**

Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary

## **Ireland**

Irish Council of Churches

## **Italy**

Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy

## **The Netherlands**

Council of Churches in the Netherlands

## **Norway**

Christian Council of Norway

## **Poland**

Polish Ecumenical Council

## **Portugal**

Portuguese Council of Christian Churches

## **Romania**

Ecumenical Association of Churches in Romania



# National Councils of Churches

## **Slovakia**

Ecumenical Council of Churches in Slovakia

## **Spain**

Spanish Committee on Cooperation between the Churches

## **Sweden**

Christian Council of Sweden

## **Switzerland**

National Council of Churches in Switzerland

## **United Kingdom**

Action of Churches Together in Scotland

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Churches Together in England

Churches Together in Wales



**ORGANISATIONS IN PARTNERSHIP**



# Organisations in Partnership

Church and Peace

Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

Conference of European Clergy

Conference of European University Chaplains

Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women

Eurodiaconia

European Alliance of YMCAs

European Forum of Christian Men

The European YWCA

Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) – Europe and Middle East Section (EMES)

Intereuropean Commission on Church and School

International Association for Christian Education

International Prison Chaplains Association – Europe

Oikosnet

Protestant and Anglican Network for life-long learning in Europe – EAEE

Union of Evangelical Free Churches

World Student Christian Federation (Europe)



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