

## Visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch in Sweden Greetings by CEC President Rev. Christian Krieger

Your All-Holiness, Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,

Your Eminence, Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden and all Scandinavia,

Right Revd Dr Johan Dalman, Bishop of Strängnäs,

Your Eminence Archbishop Sotirios of Canada,

Your Eminence Metropolitan Athenagoras of Kydonies,

Rev Fathers,

Distinguished guests,

Sister and Brothers in Christ!

It is with great joy that I greet your Clergy-Laity Synaxis in the context of the celebration of the semi-centennial of the Holy Metropolis of Sweden and All Scandinavia.

I bring you greetings from the Conference of European Churches, of which the Ecumenical Patriarchate is a prominent member. Since our last General Assembly in June 2018, we are honoured to have His Eminence Metropolitan Cleopas as Vice-President, and I am personally happy to have the pleasure of working with him, and being invited by him to participate in this celebration.

Your All-Holiness, the Conference of European Churches is grateful for the Ecumenical Patriarchate's commitment to ecumenical work over the years.

The context in which we are Christ's witnesses as churches and as an ecumenical body is deeply changing. As you are aware, Europe, European Countries, and therefore also European churches, face deep challenges. On the one hand, global ones, such as climate change, which urges us to care better for creation, the unjust sharing of resources, which calls us to solidarity and compassion, the growing international tensions and militarisation which call us to intensified work for justice and peace. On the

other hand, regional challenges, such as the lack of trust in the common European project. The recent European election showed once more that the European narrative is facing criticism in a time when migration and feelings of insecurity, fear, and dissatisfaction cause an attitude of withdrawal. In many countries in Europe the traditional political parties are being weakened and rising neo-nationalism and populism play a decisive role.

In this context, the Churches are called more than ever to promote reconciliation, cooperation and solidarity, and continue working in these areas in which the Conference of European Churches has been engaging for 60 years through its members. And in the present moment the Churches are also called to preach and live out the gospel in order to share the trust and hope that are given to us in Christ.

The *Charta Oecumenica*, signed in 2001 by the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE), which is the guidelines for the growing cooperation among Churches in Europe and their common commitment, states: *"The most important task of the churches in Europe is the common proclamation of the Gospel, in both word and deed, for the salvation of all. The widespread lack of corporate and individual orientation and falling away from Christian values challenge Christians to testify to their faith, particularly in response to the quest for meaning which is being pursued in so many forms."*

In that framework, the Conference of European Churches adopted its strategy plan which consists of three major aims: 1) to promote peace, justice and reconciliation in Europe, 2) to strengthen ecumenical fellowship and promote the mission of the Church, 3) to raise the churches' voice in Europe and the European Institutions.

These aims compel CEC as an ecumenical fellowship of 114 Churches in Europe, including 40 National Councils of Churches and organisations in partnership, to commit deeply to strengthening ecumenical partnerships, especially with the more recently established churches, often called 'migrant' or 'minority ethnic' churches. The ongoing processes of secularisation as well as the changing religious landscape in Europe, challenge established churches, or churches that have historical longevity, to reconsider questions of gospel and culture, re-examine the meaning of unity and catholicity of the Body of Christ, and rethink plurality in

Christianity and also in society. The current reality challenges the Church to revisit the biblical vision of Christian unity: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:12-13). In the next few years, therefore, our task as a major platform for ecumenical dialogue in Europe is to reflect together on the Church as ‘koinonia’ and examine our understanding of Church unity and witness in dialogue with the ‘migrant’ and ‘minority ethnic’ churches in the continent.

As part of its efforts to foster theological dialogue ecumenically, the Conference of European Churches is organising a Conference on Church Unity in 2020 to commemorate the 1920 Patriarchal and Synodical Encyclical addressed ‘Unto the Churches of Christ everywhere’, and the Lambeth Appeal to All Christian People issued the same year. Both texts are considered institutional for ecumenical dialogue within the Orthodox and Anglican traditions respectively.

Your All-Holiness, we are grateful that you gave your blessing to hold this conference in Istanbul and we are honoured and privileged to have you as a main speaker.

In November, we are looking forward to welcoming you in Brussels, the city where the headquarters of the Conference of European Churches are located, and we are looking forward to further cooperation with the Ecumenical Patriarchate with regard to the European Institutions.

With these thoughts, I wish the Clergy-Laity synaxis a successful gathering and pray that our Lord Jesus Christ will strengthen and inspire your work!