



**9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the  
Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)  
Sibiu, Romania 27 August – 2 September 2024**

**FINAL REPORT**

**1. Introduction**

“In the light of Christ – called to hope” – this was the theme of the 9th General Assembly of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) in Sibiu (Transylvania). From August 27 to September 2, 2024, 100 delegates from 70 member churches and representatives from four participating churches and more than 100 advisors, guests, stewards and other staff met in Sibiu. The meeting was hosted by the Evangelical Church A.B. in Romania, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania, the Evangelical Methodist Church in Romania, and the Unitarian Church of Transylvania.

Light, Christ, hope and vocation were the key words running through all the spiritual parts of the meeting. In the opening service in St. Mary's Lutheran Church, which was also the venue for the meeting, four churches were welcomed which had been accepted as CPCE members since the last General Assembly: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Georgia and the Southern Caucasus, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Latvia and the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ukraine – the latter with particularly warm applause as a sign of solidarity in the war since the Russian invasion.

The withdrawal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia from the CPCE was noted with regret. Greatly missed were the brothers and sisters of the Hungarian-speaking Reformed Churches, who withdrew their delegates at short notice. However, the Assembly was grateful for the hospitality of the Reformed congregation in Sibiu as the venue for the morning services.

The participants celebrated the Sunday service in 12 different host congregations in Transylvania. There they learned about the diversity of Christian life in this region, characterised by a strong tradition of religious freedom and ecumenism.

In the concluding communion service, the outgoing Council was bid farewell and the new Council elected on August 29, 2024, was inaugurated.

CPCE is part of the worldwide ecumenical movement. This was evident in the greetings presented by Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, moderator of the World Council of Churches and the General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches Frank-Dieter Fischbach. Ireneusz Lukas, from the Lutheran World Federation, Hanns Lessing,

representing the World Communion of Reformed Churches, Alan Donaldson, General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation, and Jeremy Morris representing the Church of England, Rosangela Jarjour, General Secretary of the Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical Churches, and Üllas Tankler from the United Methodist Church addressed the General Assembly. All guests emphasised the necessity of a common witness, service and dialogue for justice, peace and reconciliation in a world characterised by multiple crises in our time. They also expressed the desire to deepen the fellowship in the ecumenical movement.

The Presidium and General Secretary of the CPCE delivered two comprehensive reports to the Assembly.

The Presidium highlighted that the CPCE has grown as a living communion and a platform of the churches sharing together. The report highlights “Being Communion in a divided age” and how the Leuenberg Agreement has led to a living, vibrant communion in worship, witness and service. Two aspects of the work were celebrating the Anniversary of the Leuenberg Agreement and responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. Facing new challenges resulted in practical sharing, support, and new ways of meeting ensuring the continuation of the work of the communion. The new strategy “Being Church Together in the Light of Hope” was introduced. This focusses about how the communion becomes more, what the communion is. Looking to the future is an integral part of Christian faith. The CPCE’s strategic future focus is to include as cross-sectional accents:

- (i) paying attention to issues of sustainability and resource conservation,
- (ii) practical and creative forms of reception of the results of CPCE work, and
- (iii) flexibility to respond to unforeseen events.

The General Secretary addressed the importance of two organisational changes since Basel, (i) CPCE as a legal entity and (ii) the change of the English name from “Community” to “Communion”, to underline the theological dimension of the word communion. The regional groups are today essential to realise communion both locally and regionally. Their work has focused on “democracy” and “churches in rural areas”. These groups make a significant contribution to cultivating relationships in the communion.

Christine Schliesser, Senior Lecturer for Systematic Theology and Ethics at Zurich University and Director of Studies at the Center for Faith and Society at Fribourg University, delivered the keynote address titled “Gimme Hope! Towards a New Theology of Hope.” She emphasised the importance of hope in Christian faith, cautioning against a false hope that fosters passivity rather than action. Schliesser explained that genuine hope bridges the future with both the past and the present, asserting that remembering past wrongs is essential for forming hope for the future. Rooted in Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection, true Christian hope goes beyond mere wishful thinking. It is an active hope that inspires and compels action.

In a panel discussion, participants of the Assembly from Northern Ireland, Croatia, Ukraine and Russia, along with Christine Schliesser, shared their experiences and reflections on the role of the church in times of war and violent conflicts. They all highlighted the importance of embodying Christian hope in the challenges faced.

The documents compiled and other projects conducted during the previous six years were discussed in seven *working groups* and seven *focus groups*. Five *future workshops* developed proposals for the work of the CPCE, of which the General Assembly adopted 15 (3.1–15) and invited the Council to follow up on the topics. Three further resolutions on the future work of the CPCE emerged from the plenary discussions (see 3.16–18). The out-going Council prepared the groundwork for these discussions by compiling the strategy document.

The General Assembly resolved to amend the statute of the CPCE (see Appendix 1) and elected the new Council (see Appendix 2). It discussed and passed statements on “Strengthening Democratic Culture for a Flourishing Unity in Diversity. Democracy as a challenge for church and society” (see Appendix 3), “Migration from the perspective of the countries of origin” (see Appendix 4), “Interreligious relations in Europe in the context of the violent conflicts in the Middle East.” (see Appendix 5) as well as a “Statement on the existence as ecclesiastical and linguistic minorities” (see Appendix 6).

## **2. Resolutions regarding the work done in 2018–2024**

### **2.1 Christian Speaking of God**

1. The General Assembly thanks the preliminary group, the participants in the 2022 consultation and the drafting group for compiling the study document on Christian speaking of God.
2. The General Assembly approves the document and considers it a guiding contribution to building understanding about the contemporary speaking of God in the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe.
3. The General Assembly recommends that the member churches study and consider the document with its reflections on the conditions, contexts, challenges and ways of Christian speaking of God.

### **2.2 Practice and theology of the Lord's Supper**

1. The General Assembly thanks the initial study group, the participants in the 2023 consultation and the editorial group for their work on the study document on the practice and theology of the Lord's Supper.
2. The General Assembly receives the document as a preliminary result of the work and considers it a helpful contribution to understanding the practice and theology of the Lord's Supper in the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe. The Practice of the Lord's Supper must be illuminated and further developed in our churches especially with regard to inclusion, interculturality, language and accessibility.
3. The General Assembly welcomes the discussion of the document in the member churches.

## **2.3 Church and Democracy**

1. The General Assembly thanks the regional groups involved in the study process and the participants in the consultation of the regional groups 2024 for their work on the topic of "Democracy as a challenge for churches and societies".
2. The General Assembly thanks the Southeast European Regional Group for its work on the impulse paper "Church and Democracy".
3. The General Assembly receives the document as a preliminary result of the work from a specific region of Europe and considers it a helpful contribution to understanding the conditions, positions, concerns and principles of action of Protestant churches.
4. The General Assembly takes note of the list of further materials that have emerged from the study process.
5. The General Assembly welcomes the discussion of this material in the member churches.
6. The General Assembly instructs the Council to use the existing materials to publish a working aid for further work in the member churches in electronic and printed form.

## **2.4 Gender, Sexuality, Marriage, Family**

1. The General Assembly thanks the study group for its work and the participants of the consultation meeting for their input.
2. The General Assembly takes note that the Council of the CPCE received the study document "gender, sexuality, marriage, family" and decided to publish it with a foreword from the Presidium.
3. The General Assembly calls the member churches to raise awareness and adopt measures for safeguarding against sexual abuse.
4. The General Assembly mandates the Council to set up a work process to share experiences with safeguarding measures to evaluate them and to promote good practice in the Protestant churches in Europe.

[It is noted that resolution 2.4.2 was passed with 69 votes in favour, 4 against and 8 abstentions.]

## **3. Resolutions on the fields of work 2024–2030**

*[Linguistic harmonisation and finalisation of the wording of the decisions will be carried out by the Council at its first working meeting, as both German and English were the working languages.]*

1. The General Assembly invites the Council to explore the possibilities and practicalities of developing digital networking technologies to enable the sharing of knowledge and experiences between member churches and other relevant organisations.

2. The General Assembly invites the Council to consider imaginative ways of communicating within the communion, using a variety of different media and in a variety of different languages. It should consider how it uses external communications more widely to make the work of the communion better known.
3. The General Assembly encourages the Council to continue work with Young Christians and the programme “Young Theologians in Communion”. New formats are to be developed to bring young Christians in the European and South American context into contact with each other.
4. The General Assembly invites the Council to initiate a doctrinal conversation on the topic of confessionality in the church communion. This process will address the ongoing challenges of deepening our church communion while respecting our ongoing doctrinal differences and of participating in ecumenical dialogue.
5. The General Assembly invites the Council to initiate work on the topics of the missional sharing Christian faith and the handing on of the faith to the coming generations. This might be in the form of consultations and/or the development of digital networks.
6. The General Assembly invites the Council to initiate a process on the topic of theology of change. This process will address the challenges of dealing both with wider changes in our society and within the church.
7. The General Assembly invites the Council to initiate a study process on the topic of “being human” in a way that recognizes our distinctive Protestant traditions as well as our common teaching and in the light of current challenges.
8. The General Assembly invites the Council to explore the topic of church renewal processes reacting to rapid social changes and the associated secularisation in many places in Europe.
9. The General Assembly invites the Council to initiate a Liturgical consultation on the topic of occasional offices (for example, weddings and funerals) in changing societies.
10. The General Assembly invites the Council to continue work on the topic of church and democracy encouraging this to happen in Regional Groups.
11. The Assembly invites the Council to initiate work on the Ethics and practices of agreement and disagreement, reflecting on particular case studies, which would include questions of power, culture and ethics of silence. It should consider the further development of the Code of Conduct to aid creating safe meeting spaces.
12. The Assembly invites the Council to find appropriate ways for the Communion to reflect on the use of scripture within ethical discernment.
13. The General Assembly invites the Council to continue work on migration, recognising this is a broad topic including ethical, theological, legal, political, social and diaconal dimensions. It encourages the continued work of the Advisory Group on Migration and Church Communion, and encourages the Council to seek to relate its work in this field to our identity as a Protestant Church Communion.

14. The Assembly invites the Council, In the light of recent and ongoing wars and conflicts to reconsider doctrines of peace and war from a Protestant perspective, which also includes reflecting upon concrete experiences.

15. The General Assembly invites the council to (in order of priority)

i. continue the dialogue with the European Baptist Federation with a view to promoting the intention of entering into communion;

ii. keep in close partnership with the Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical Churches on theological and diaconal issues and invite representatives to relevant working groups of CPCE;

iii. continue the dialogue with the Pontifical Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity on ecclesiology to its conclusion, for the results to be evaluated with a view to considering further steps;

iv. continue dialogue with the Anglican Churches in Europe with the intention of deepening mutual relationships (e. g. Eucharistic hospitality);

v. continue to develop conversations with churches of a migration background with denominational European structures, recognising their increasing importance for the body of Christ in Europe;

vi. find possibilities for communication with the Orthodox church, preferably, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in particular on issues of social ethics and consider doing this through the Center for Protestant Theology in Eastern Europe (ZETO) (including the participation of young people);

vii. maintain, and if possible, intensify the fellowship projects in cooperation with the Gustav-Adolf-Werk.

16. The General Assembly invites the Council, to add a focus on a strong representation at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

17. The General Assembly request the Council in preparing for the Tenth General Assembly to encourage the churches to include lay people in their delegations and candidates for the CPCE elections.

18. The General Assembly request the Council to prepare an amendment to the Statute of 2006 Section 5, for the next General Assembly, concerning the membership of the Council to include at least two lay people.

**Appendix 1: Statute of the CPCE in the amended version of 30 August 2024**

**S t a t u t e**  
**of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe<sup>1</sup>**  
**– Leuenberg Church Fellowship –**

From 15 September 2018  
Amended on 30 August 2024

**§1**

**Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe**

- (I) <sup>1</sup>The Reformation churches in Europe assenting to the Agreement of Reformation Churches in Europe declare and realise church communion amongst one another. <sup>2</sup>These churches form the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe – Leuenberg Church Fellowship (CPCE). <sup>3</sup>The CPCE serves to bring about church communion as described in IV.2 of the Agreement of Reformation Churches in Europe, specifically through “their common undertaking of witness and service” and continuing theological work.
- (II) <sup>1</sup>More churches may enter this church fellowship on the basis of the Agreement of Reformation Churches in Europe by specific agreement. <sup>2</sup>Details are set out in the guidelines establishing membership of the CPCE adopted by the Council.

**§2**

**Legal status and head office**

- (I) <sup>1</sup>The CPCE is a public corporation within the meaning of the Austrian law of 6 July 1961 on external legal relations of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions (the “Protestant law”, Federal Law Gazette No. 182/1961 in the valid version). <sup>2</sup>Its head office is in Vienna, Austria.
- (II) The CPCE may avail itself of administrative assistance from its Member Churches.

**§3**

**Governing bodies**

CPCE’s governing bodies are the

1. General Assembly
2. Council
3. Presidium of the Council

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<sup>1</sup> A list of the Member Churches of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) is accessible at: <http://www.leuenberg.net/member-churches>

4. General Secretary

5. regional groups.

#### §4

##### **The General Assembly**

- (I) <sup>1</sup>The General Assembly is responsible for taking all decisions, particularly those of fundamental importance, unless otherwise stipulated in this statute. <sup>2</sup>It has the following tasks, in particular:
1. taking policy decisions for CPCE activity, especially for the work of the Council;
  2. deliberating and deciding on the motions of members and on documents for decision presented by the Council;
  3. electing the members of the Council;
- <sup>3</sup>The General Assembly shall adopt its own rules of procedure.
- (II) <sup>1</sup>The CPCE General Assembly shall, as a rule, convene every six years. <sup>2</sup>It shall comprise the following members:
1. The Member Churches shall send delegates as members with the right to vote, speak and move motions, in the following numbers:
    - a) One (1) delegate for every Member Church with up to 100,000 members;
    - b) Two (2) delegates for every member church with between 100,000 and 3,000,000 members;
    - c) Three (3) delegates for every member church with more than 3,000,000 members;
    - d) Four (4) delegates for the Protestant Church in Switzerland;
  2. up to ten delegates appointed by the Council with the right to vote, speak and move motions;
  3. up to two delegates from each participating church with the right to speak and move motions, but not to vote;
  4. those members of the Council in office who are not delegates, as well as the CPCE General Secretary, who have the right to speak and move motions, but not to vote;
  5. advisors invited by the Council, who attend the General Assembly with the right to speak.
- (III) <sup>1</sup>The General Assembly shall have a quorum if at least half of voting members are present. <sup>2</sup>A resolution shall be carried (passed) if more votes are cast in favour than against. <sup>3</sup>Abstentions and invalid votes shall not be counted as votes cast. <sup>4</sup>In the event of a tied vote the motion shall be deemed rejected.
- (IV) <sup>1</sup>The proceedings in plenary are public unless decided otherwise in an individual case.



## §5

### **The Council**

- (I) <sup>1</sup>The Council is responsible for the work between general assemblies. <sup>2</sup>It has the following tasks, in particular:
1. promoting church communion on the basis of the Agreement of Reformation Churches in Europe and the resolutions of general assemblies;
  2. implementing the resolutions of the General Assembly;
  3. preparing the ground for new resolutions of the General Assembly;
  4. defining policy and issuing individual instructions for the work of CPCE, as long as this does not impinge on any exclusive competences of the General Assembly;
  5. accompanying the theological doctrinal conversations and working groups (advisory boards, regional groups, project groups);
  6. preparing for and holding General Assemblies;
  7. supervising the head office;
  8. adopting the CPCE budget;
  9. commissioning the audit and voting to approve the activities of head office staff, as required.
- <sup>3</sup>The Council shall adopt its own rules of procedure.
- (II) <sup>1</sup>The Council shall be elected by the General Assembly. <sup>2</sup>It shall have 13 members and a corresponding number of substitutes personally allocated to each one. <sup>3</sup>The election of the Council must take appropriate account of the denominational and regional structure of CPCE. <sup>4</sup>Retiring members shall be replaced by co-option.
- (III) <sup>1</sup>The Council shall generally convene once or twice a year. <sup>2</sup>It shall meet for the first time during the General Assembly and elect from its midst a Presidium consisting of three presidents, one of them an executive member. <sup>3</sup>Deselection and by-election are possible. <sup>4</sup>The presidents shall represent the CPCE externally. They shall report to the Council.
- (IV) The term of office of the Council shall end when the Council elected by the next General Assembly has met and elected its Presidium.

## §6

### **Head office, General Secretary**

- (I) <sup>1</sup>The work of the General Assembly and the Council shall be supported by a head office. <sup>2</sup>The head office shall work according to the instructions of the General Assembly and the Council.
- (II) <sup>1</sup>The head office shall be directed by the General Secretary. <sup>2</sup>The General Secretary shall be appointed by the Council. <sup>3</sup>He or she shall manage the day-to-day business. <sup>4</sup>He or she shall

be accountable to the General Assembly and the Council. <sup>5</sup>The Council shall adopt rules of procedure for the head office. <sup>5</sup>The Council can appoint a deputy General Secretary. <sup>6</sup>In the General Secretary's absence, this deputy shall take on the responsibilities and representative duties of the office of the General Secretary in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the office. <sup>7</sup>§ 8 remains unchanged.

## § 7

### **Regional groups**

- (I) <sup>1</sup>The regional groups serve to realize church communion in the region. <sup>2</sup>They work independently in their respective regional areas of responsibility and finance their work themselves.
- (II) Recognition as a regional group is carried out by the Council on the basis of a written agreement between the Council and said regional group.
- (III) <sup>1</sup>Regional groups can be entrusted with working processes. <sup>2</sup>They can take action in the name of CPCE, so long as there is a written agreement with the Council stating as such. <sup>3</sup>Regional groups coordinate with the CPCE head office in Vienna on all issues related to CPCE.

## §8

### **Representation in legal transactions**

<sup>1</sup>The CPCE shall be represented by the Executive President or the General Secretary. <sup>2</sup>Transactions with a total value exceeding EUR 100,000 in the individual case may only be undertaken jointly by the above-mentioned persons. <sup>3</sup>For the execution of transactions which in individual cases do not exceed an amount of 20,000 EUR, the rules of procedure issued for the office may provide for the authorization of other persons to represent the CPCE in legal transactions.

## §9

### **Applicable law**

Unless otherwise determined, applicable law shall be that of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions in Austria, as well as of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria and the Evangelical Church of the Helvetic Confession in Austria.

## §10

### **Budget**

<sup>1</sup>The CPCE budget shall be financed by contributions from all churches and from grants. <sup>2</sup>The assessment of contributions is designed to take account of the size and financial capacity of the Member Churches. <sup>3</sup>Attending CPCE events and participating in its governing bodies presupposes the regular payment of contributions. <sup>4</sup>The budget shall be generally based on the financial year and must balance income and expenditure. <sup>5</sup>The budget shall be adopted by the Council.

## **§11**

### **Amending the statute**

- (I) <sup>1</sup>This statute can only be amended by a resolution expressly changing or supplementing its wording. <sup>2</sup>The resolution shall require the approval of two thirds of the voting members present at the General Assembly.
- (II) <sup>1</sup>At least three months before the discussion, relevant documents for decision, along with an explanation by the Presidium, must be available to the members of the General Assembly and the church executives of the Member Churches, so that they can respond. <sup>2</sup>These documents must contain the wording of the proposed amendments and a statement of reasons.

## **§12**

### **Withdrawal of a Member Church**

- (I) Withdrawal from the CPCP takes place when a Member Church informs the Council in writing of its wish to leave.
- (II) <sup>1</sup>Irrespective of paragraph 1, a Member Church shall leave the CPCE if the theological preconditions for the declaration of church communion are no longer given and this has been established by resolution of the General Assembly. <sup>2</sup>The resolution shall require the approval of two thirds of voting members present; the withdrawal shall take effect with the resolution.
- (III) The withdrawal of a Member Church from the CPCE marks the termination of office of all members of the General Assembly and the Council belonging to the relevant Member Church.

## **§13**

### **Final provisions**

- (I) <sup>1</sup>The General Assembly shall decide on the disbanding of the CPCE. <sup>2</sup>The resolution shall require a majority of two thirds of voting members present at the General Assembly. <sup>3</sup>In the event of the CPCE disbanding, its assets shall – after settling all liabilities – fall to the CPCE Member Churches in proportion to their average contributions over the last five years.

## Appendix 2: Elections: Council and Presidium

The General Assembly elected a new CPCE Council on August 31, 2024. The following persons belong to it:

Members	Proxies
Rev. Ingrid Bachler Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria	Rev. Markus Schaefer Evangelical Church in the Rhineland (Germany)
Rev. Dr Nathan Eddy United Reformed Church (United Kingdom)	Rev. Marco Batenburg Protestant Church in the Netherlands
Rev. Rita Famos Protestant Church in Switzerland	Rev. Dr Martin Hirzel Protestant Church in Switzerland
Rev. Laura Kjærgaard Fischer Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark	Rev. Marcin Brzóska Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland
Rev. Dimitris Boukis Evangelical Church of Greece	Rev. Prof. Dr Pawel Andrzej Gajewski Waldensian Evangelical Church (Italy)
Rev. Dr Annette Gruschwitz United Methodist Church Germany	Rev. Dr Jørgen Thaarup United Methodist Church, Northern Europe (Denmark)
Rev. Eva Guldanová Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia	Rev. Jana Hofmanová Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren
Rev. Dr Tamás Kodácsy Reformed Church in Hungary	Dr Klára Tarr Cselovszky Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Hungary
Prof. Dr Georg Plasger Evangelical Reformed Church / Evangelical Church in the Rhineland (Germany)	Rev. Dr Susanne Bei der Wieden Evangelical Reformed Church (Germany)
Rev. Thomas Prieto Peral Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (Germany)	Rev. Raphael Quandt Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (Germany)
Rev. Dr Ulrich Rösen-Weinhold United Protestant Church of France	Rev. Petra Renate Magne de la Croix Union of the Protestant Church of Alsace and Lorraine in France
Rev. Ulrike Scherf Protestant Church in Hessen and Nassau (Germany)	Rev. Dr Susanne Schenk Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Württemberg (Germany)
Rt Rev Marko Tiitus Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church	Rev. Gerhard Servatius-Depner Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania

The Council held its constituent meeting on 1 September 2024 and elected a three-member Presidium consisting of Rev. Rita Famos (Executive President), Prof. Dr Georg Plasger and Rt. Rev. Marko Tiitus.

### **Appendix 3: Strengthening Democratic Culture for a Flourishing Unity in Diversity. Democracy as a challenge for church and society. Statement of the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) to Our Member Churches**

The European churches are confronted with challenging crises. They are part of democratic societies shaped in different ways, and have a 'public mission', that is understood differently in each case. Protestant churches in Europe want to take responsibility by playing an active role and to enable participation. The forms of participation are based on different traditions and are shaped by individual and collective experiences.

Especially when it comes to questions of individual lifestyle, political action and, in particular, existential issues, it is sometimes difficult to negotiate compromises and live with majority decisions.

The churches' contribution to reconciliation and understanding in Europe aims to strengthen democratic culture in these challenging situations. Three aspects are important:

- Churches as constructively critical partners in democratic societies.
- A church that champions respect for human dignity and seeks to strengthen trust in democracy.
- Churches as spaces that show how diversity and community can be lived together at the same time.

#### ***Churches as constructive and critical partners in democratic societies***

Churches have a theological mission to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel. They do not have the authority of political definition from the Word of God, but the Word makes them constructively critical partners in the democratic structure: critical and self-critical, ready for course correction and a new beginning.

#### ***A church that champions respect for human dignity and seeks to strengthen trust in democracy***

CPCE churches see themselves as 'thinking communities' committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in an inseparable community of worship and table fellowship. The relationship of the church to democracy is therefore not a question of theological confession but represents a theological search movement directed towards society.

Positive participation of the church in democracy means that it stands up for a society where human dignity is respected, all opinions can be discussed and minorities are not discriminated against. For the church, this is linked to the idea of the image of God in the human being who hears the Word of God. Individually or collectively, Christians are thus prompted to get actively involved. Churches would do well to facilitate this in democratic forms of participation. In this way, churches can also credibly testify to the outside world what they experience among themselves.

Democratic processes are jeopardized when people lose their trust in democracy and even actively disrupt it. The result is that people withdraw from their commitment to the

community and no longer treat each other with respect. If democracy is in existential danger, churches are called upon to raise their voices in the light of the Gospel wherever possible. They can actively support all those who are committed to preserving democracy.

***Churches want to be spaces that show how, together, diversity and community can be lived out, at the same time.***

Within the church communion, it is not always possible to agree on common positions on ethical issues. Precisely in such situations it is the task of the churches to open up spaces for exchange, to support debates and to accompany them in the light of the Gospel. Democracy also includes the ability to critically question its procedures and results, and to defend ourselves against them using constitutional means. Democratic community relations are therefore particularly suitable for debating controversial, morally charged issues.

**As Protestant churches in Europe, we are convinced that churches are in a position to make a lively contribution to living together democratically in order to shape our common future.**

Sibiu/Hermannstadt/Nagyszeben, 1 September 2024

#### **Appendix 4: Migration from the perspective of the countries of origin. Statement of the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe**

**Migration** is in Europe often discussed from the perspective of the receiving countries. It is important, to discern also the perspective of the countries in Europe, which register often high numbers of emigration. Migration is a form of human and social life. We are used to seeing sedentary life as the basic form, but this is not historically correct. Nomadic or semi-nomadic cultures, the migrant journeymen or the influx into cities at the time of industrialisation show that migration is at least nothing unusual.

From a biblical perspective, Abraham leaving his homeland is a reference figure for all monotheistic religions. The 40-year-long wandering of the people of Israel through the desert is also a symbolic story of new beginnings and wanderings in contemporary cultural tradition. Last but not least, Jesus Christ was a travelling preacher. We find the motif typologically and theologically reflected in the epistolary literature when Christians are described as the *wandering people of God* who are looking for the 'city to come' (Hebrews 13:12-14).

Europe, and Central and Eastern Europe in particular, has experienced various migratory movements over the last 150 years, in which 'pull' and 'push' factors have alternated.

- At the turn of the 20th century, thousands of people – driven by *poverty and hope* – moved to America from areas that are now part of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. They broke away from their established communities in the hope of returning after a short time. Most of them stayed there forever.
- As a result of the First World War and the formation of nation states, people of the '*wrong*' *ethnicity* moved across the new borders as individuals, as village communities or in state-regulated population exchanges (e.g. Pontus Greeks, Balkan Muslims, Transylvanian Hungarians, etc.).
- The Second World War led to *ethnic communities* being almost wiped out in some countries. Living Jewish communities were destroyed by the Shoah, other ethnic minorities were expelled or deported for forced labour after the Second World War. Some were reunited in later years, others never again.
- The spread of *Soviet communism* in what later became known as the 'Eastern Bloc' led to long-lasting flight movements to the West and the formation of foreign communities and churches there (e.g. Hungarians after the Hungarian uprising in 1956, Czechs and Slovaks after the Prague Spring in 1968).
- The fall of the Iron Curtain led to further *ethnically motivated* resettlement to historical homelands (e.g. Slovaks, Hungarians or Transylvanian Saxons).
- However, intensive labour migration also began at this time, generated by the income gap and supported by the free movement of workers in the European Union. The scale of this migration far exceeded that of previous movements (of 20 million Romanians, over 5 million are living abroad).

From a sociological perspective, however, migration in the years after 2000 has changed significantly due to factors such as mobility and digital communication. If until the late 20th century migration meant a definitive move from one social space to another, this is no longer the case. The scientifically so-called 'transmigrants' do not completely abandon their old homeland but create spaces between the country of



origin and the destination country.<sup>2</sup> Thanks to digital communication, the community does not break down (in the short term) even across borders. Multi-local extended families are a reality.

Living in a transitional space, or between two worlds, brings with it medium and long-term difficulties, uprooting and alienation. This affects **families** in particular. It is estimated that between 95,000 and 160,000 children in Romania have at least one parent living abroad.<sup>3</sup> The figure for Europe is estimated at between 500,000 and 1 million! What this means – for both children and parents – needs no further explanation. The mother who can only come home every two summers, but otherwise only speaks to her ten-year-old daughter via Zoom, is a symbol of being torn apart.

Migration and disruption leave their mark on **local communities**, especially **church communities**. Key players are missing, gaps are opening up in the local social fabric, structures are ageing, and continuity is being lost. The consequences of migration are exacerbated by the rural exodus, with young families – with and without children – moving to cities. A bishop from Eastern Europe says: ‘The people who go to the West are missing here. This is a painful loss for us.’

For many people, especially those from minority churches in Central and Eastern Europe, the **home church** in their country of origin played an important role in their lives. It meant community, a neighbourhood structure, their own identity, mother tongue, home and firm faith traditions. All of this is in danger of being lost through emigration.

The problem affects entire **countries**, as there are far fewer contributors to the health and pension systems of Eastern and Central European countries because working adults pay their taxes and contributions in other countries. As an increasing number of well-educated people move abroad, there is also a shortage of skilled labour.<sup>4</sup>

The churches in Central and Eastern Europe say with the motto of the 9<sup>th</sup> CPCE General Assembly:

*‘We are called to hope. The size of a church is not determined by its number of members, but by its tasks.’* This has given rise to **new impulses**. Some churches have opened up to bilingualism or multilingualism. Where gaps have been torn, new energies have often arisen in congregations, people who were not previously in view have taken on responsibility and mastered it well.

### **What can be done?**

The basic prerequisite must be that the people who move away do not become scapegoats in their country of origin and do not become second-class citizens in the destination country! *Migration* is part of the existing **way of life** and people's turmoil, and grief must be respected. Despite all the pain that has been and will be caused, we

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<sup>2</sup> *The change from Germany to Romania, from Munich to Sibiu, only takes 1:20, as long as the flight takes. That is shorter than many a change within one's own country, like the journey from Bucharest to Sibiu, which can take 5 hours.*

<sup>3</sup> *Figures from 2019*

<sup>4</sup> *In the last ten years alone, 45000 doctors have left Romania.*

encourage people in the countries of origin to accept biographical decisions and to accompany people in the destination countries in their new phase of life.

**Church communities** are called upon to create living spaces for transmigrants that accommodate their lifestyle. You can be part of a community (and a member of a church congregation) even if you don't live in the same place all the time and perhaps only spend time in your country of origin – i.e. at home – on holiday. Church congregations and diaconal organisations in the countries of origin and destination are asked to work together to find ways to support families who are torn apart by migration. In this context, we recall, for example, the CPCE's project with the GAW to support Euro-orphans.

**Church leaders** are asked to consider the question of dual membership. This will also facilitate integration in the new environment.<sup>5</sup> We call on the **governments** of the destination countries to ensure a fair balance: not just to poach skilled workers and be happy that willing and affordable carers are filling the gaps in their own societies, but also to find solidarity arrangements, which respect the needs of the countries of origin.

Sibiu/Hermannstadt/Nagyszeben, 1 September 2024

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<sup>5</sup> *Positive examples: Lutheran Slovaks who live in the Austrian Burgenland can be members of the Evangelical Church A.B. Austria AND the Evangelical Church A.B. in Slovakia. The Evangelical Church A.B. in Romania, in consultation with member churches of the Evangelical Church in Germany, has introduced dual membership with benefits for all concerned.*

## **Appendix 5: Interreligious relations in Europe in the context of the violent conflicts in the Middle East. An Appeal by the General Assembly of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) in Sibiu 2024 to its member churches**

### **(1) Situation and Context**

The violent conflicts in the Middle East are of grave consequences. They have demanded innumerable victims and are in danger of further unpredictable escalation. Moreover, they are damaging the relationships between the religious communities, not only in the region but throughout the world. They have shaken their mutual trust in each other, and in many places put into question all forms of cooperation and dialogue. They put a lasting strain on our dialogue with members of the Jewish and the Muslim communities also in Europe. Where people no longer talk to one another, prejudices grow, and the readiness for violence increases.

We cannot remain speechless and inactive in the face of these developments in our societies. “The gospel liberates and unites our communion for joint commitment to work for justice and peace in the world.” (Leuenberg Agreement 36). In relation to interreligious dialogue, we concur with the formulations of the Study Process «Christian Speaking of God“ (2024): „Interreligious dialogue [...] is a key resource for overcoming ignorance, fear and prejudice in the quest for freedom, justice and peace in the world. “ (Art. 189, Z. 9-11).

**Therefore, as General Assembly we call on our member churches:**

### **(2) Remain ready for dialogue with people of other religions and seek new avenues of coming together**

- Listen first of all to each other’s personal stories, in how they shape our thinking, in order to better understand our respective arguments. Instantaneous discussion of facts in relation to conflicts in the Middle East can easily lead to dead ends;
- Tell each other how the conflicts in the Middle East are situated in your personal biography;
- Speak about your own consternation in the face of the escalation of violence in the Middle East and how this has changed you.

### **(3) Recognise people of other religions and their beliefs in a differentiated, respectful and appreciative way**

- Refrain from sweeping judgements;
- Challenge and counter any form of antisemitism;
- Reject any form of islamophobia;
- Remain critically alert in relation to the danger of religion being instrumentalised for the justification of political claims.

Often Israelis and Palestinians are judged and condemned in a blanket manner, and in a polarising manner divided into friends and enemies. The conflicts in the Middle East force people to take sides and hardly allow anymore for differentiations.

In Europe, too, the conflicts tempt us to perceive people of Jewish and Muslim faith in an undifferentiated way as closed homogeneous groups („the Jews“, „the Muslims“) and to allege that they collectively have good or bad intentions or interests. Such a perception does enduring damage to interreligious relations and inhibits dialogue.

**(4) Give expression to your empathy with people who suffer in these conflicts**

- Stay on the side of those who suffer from terror, violence and oppression, irrespective of which nation, language or religion they belong to.;
- In as much as you are able offer support to humanitarian aid for those suffering as a result of the conflicts in the Middle East;
- Through your contacts with the protestant churches in the region, especially via FMEEC, offer your support to Christians in the Middle East who are themselves suffering from the conflicts, while also acting as mediators.
- Advocate for non-violence, mutual understanding and reconciliation.

The conflicts in the Middle East induce a polarisation through which only the suffering of one's own group is recognised while the suffering of the other side is ignored. Christians, however, are called to stand by those who are suffering from violence, terror and injustice, irrespective of their religion. (cf. Lukas 10,36 esp. the question „Who is my neighbour?“). Such solidarity is an important precondition for the shaping of interreligious relations in the future.

**(5) Seek to overcome speechlessness**

- Continue to advocate and pray for peace and justice in all the world and for harmony among people of different religions.;
- Endure patiently when people of different religions stay away from dialogue;
- When escalation of violence, political dilemmas or the positions of your partners in dialogue render you speechless or causes your emotions run high, then withdraw for a while into silence or prayer.

One task for protestant churches in Europe could be to offer a safe space to people from the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities, in which suspicion and prejudices can be overcome.

We Christians in Europe are encouraged to be ready at all times to reengage with dialogue and to live the possibility of peace. (Romans 12,18).

**Keep in mind that there is no alternative to dialogue.**

## **Appendix 6: Statement on the existence as ecclesiastical and linguistic minorities. Statement of the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe**

The majority of Protestant churches in Europe see themselves as minority churches. Some already have roots in the time before the Reformation, while others were forced to define themselves as a religious or denominational minority community in relation to the respective majority church as a result of the Reformation. Later, there were churches that became a minority in terms of denomination, language, culture or ethnicity, mainly because of historical and social changes. The experience of persecution, flight, but also of religious peace, tolerance and peaceful coexistence (as in Transylvania, for example, through the Edict of Torda/Thorenburg in 1568) are part of this history. In other parts of Europe, confessionalisation has created religiously homogeneous areas and a majority religious landscape with a comprehensive church structure and an established institutional structure. But even former majority denominations have become a minority in their own social context, primarily as a result of social modernisation, secularisation and dechuraching. At all times, the challenge for the church has been to interpret its own position and its current status in relation to historical experiences: as a church organised under constitutional law, as a popular church, as a minority church or as a diaspora church. All Protestant churches therefore have experience with the minority situation. The evaluation and interpretation of this situation varies due to the theological prerequisites, political framework conditions and legal contexts.

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), formerly the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, has consciously focussed on the challenges of minority situations at the level of lived church fellowship, in partnerships between member churches and at the level of theological study processes<sup>6</sup>. It has endeavoured to raise awareness of the fact that belonging to a denominational minority can be a source of both mutual enrichment and conflict. There is the opportunity to perceive a special mission (witness) in one's own context, but also the risk of (mutual / self-) exclusion and the resulting marginalisation.

However, the CPCE is also aware that the minority situation is not only the result of the spread of the Reformation in political and social contexts or the state formations created by European wars and peace treaties. New domestic and foreign policy decisions, military and armed conflicts lead to new discrimination and open up new chapters of individual and collective suffering. Today's war conflicts, political, economic and ecological upheavals lead to demographic changes such as emigration or migration. As a result, former majority churches are becoming minority churches or minority churches are threatened in their existence. However, the CPCE is also aware of the fact that new minorities are forming in some of its member churches, groups of people who find themselves in a numerical minority due to flight from war, migration, linguistic and cultural differences, individual lifestyles and shared values. At the same time, they seek refuge and understanding within the Christian community, which is not always granted.

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<sup>6</sup> The Church of Jesus Christ (1995); Church - People - State - Nation (2001); Theology of the Diaspora (2018).

The Assembly draws the attention of the member churches to the rapid changes in society, which do not leave the life and witness of the member churches untouched. The General Assembly therefore recommends that its member churches

- openly reflect on their own minority situation and experiences;
- ask themselves how it deals with their own internal minority groups and where there are obstacles to acceptance in accordance with the Gospel;
- reflect on their own history if they were involved in oppressing minorities and to initiate a reappraisal of this history;
- stand up for the rights of minorities in society and, where necessary, to advocate internationally through the CPCE for the recognition of ecclesiastical, linguistic and national minorities in their own contexts, try to build bridges between majority and minority in terms of religious and denominational, linguistic and cultural, ethnic and national identities.

We encourage the member churches to seek opportunities to exchange experiences in order to learn from each other and to support each other in the search for solutions for their own minority situation. We encourage the member churches to intensify the lived church communion (in word and sacrament) as a source and motivating force of solidarity and responsibility for one another.

Sibiu/Hermannstadt/Nagyszeben, 1 September 2024