



Conference of European Churches  
Conférence des Eglises Européennes  
Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen  
Конференция Европейских Церквей

# *VALUES - RELIGION - IDENTITY*

A project organised by the  
Church & Society Commission of  
the Conference of European Churches  
with partners

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Comité Européen de Coordination



Evangelische Kirche  
in Deutschland



Education and Culture

## Active European Citizenship

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## **Introduction**

Recent developments in the European Union have drawn increasing attention to the role of values in determining the Union's policies and their link to people's identities. On a number of occasions, the EU has been repeatedly introduced as a value project. Values linked to the EU construction and their connection with a broader understanding of the whole continent and its history are the subject of concerns and in-depth studies. Themes of values and identity are increasingly on the agenda of debates related to the future of Europe. Churches and religions are expected to play a prominent role in this discourse. The project Values – Religion – Identity is a contribution to this discussion.

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## **Partners**

### **Conference of European Churches (CEC/CSC)**

CEC/CSC is a fellowship of 125 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches from all countries of Europe, plus 40 associated organisations, founded in 1959. Its Church & Society Commission has the task to help the churches study "Church & Society" questions from a theological and social-ethical perspective, especially those with a European dimension and related to political institutions working in Europe. To its mandate belongs:

- to encourage and sustain a Christian contribution to political, social and economic life in Europe;
- as a strong partner of the European Institutions, to advocate and promote a Europe of solidarity, reconciliation and human dignity;
- to create a space for member churches to meet and find ways to act together for the common good in Europe.

### **United Reformed Church**

The United Reformed Church is one of the main line denominations in the United Kingdom and is in the family of the "Reformed" tradition within Europe. It has 1630 church buildings and 76013 members. The social justice programmes and community involvement schemes are a significant part of the life of the church and recent research has shown that this denomination has more community activity taking place on its premises than other denominations.

### **Protestant Church in Germany (EKD)**

The EKD is a fellowship of 23 Protestant regional churches (Landeskirchen) from all Germany. The church has a federal structure. More than 23 million members belong to the EKD. The church is actively involved in charitable and social activities and is visible and present at various levels of life in society. The church has a developed structure from the grassroots level through regional to national level. Through its offices in Berlin and Brussels and its involvement in CEC the EKD actively follows the developments in the European Union and the Council of Europe.

### **Comité Européen de Coordination (CEC)**

The CEC is an international NGO with member organisations from Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Poland and Romania. Its objectives are:

- Active promotion of European integration
- Support of social programmes aiming and integration of disabled and socially marginalized peoples and communities and support of youth
- Promotion and facilitation of the information about the values and objectives of the European Union

### **Aims of the project**

- To arrange two conferences/seminars where church leaders and interested parties could meet to discuss values, religion and identity.
- To raise awareness in the churches of the EU and to promote reflection,
- To encourage further debate, reflection and involvement on issues of integration and active citizenship within churches and their members,
- To help develop better communications and dialogue between churches and the EU,
- To help develop better understanding between ethnic and religious groups to enable respect and tolerance.

### **Events**

#### **Stage 1: Conference in Brussels, 12 – 13 December 2006**

The conference on 12-13 December 2006 in Brussels was the first stage of the project. The conference was prepared by the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches in cooperation with other partners participating on the project: the Comité Européen de Coordination, the United Reformed Church in the UK and the EKD. The objectives of the conference were:

- To contribute to the current debate on the Future of Europe
- To discuss the implications facing the EU in regard to values, identity and religious expressions
- To encourage the discussion on the Future of Europe among the churches in Europe

Up to 100 participants from 27 European countries were present at the conference. (The full list of participants is attached). The conference was designed to enable the maximum multiplication effect and to promote in the best possible way discussion on European values in church communities in the continent. For these reasons the top church leaders from the community of the Conference of European Churches, which gathers 125 member churches from all over the continent, were invited to the conference. The event was the ‘Church Leaders’ Conference.’

The programme of the conference included presentations by the political representatives: the Finnish EU Presidency and the contribution of the EU Commissioner for Education and Culture Jan Figel, as well as contributions of church leaders from different churches, Anglican, Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic and different countries of the European continent. Two press conferences were held within the programme of the conference in which the framework and outcomes of the meeting were shared with the press.

The programme of the conference was structured into five thematic areas:

- European values – churches in dialogue with European political institutions
- On which values is Europe built?
- The future of the European project

- What is the specific contribution of the churches to the European project and how can this contribution be made?
- The role of the churches and religions in European culture and developing European identity

**The programme of the conference and the text of the presentations can be found at:** <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/values.shtml>

### **Stage 2: Conference/ Symposium in London, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2007**

The consultation on 15<sup>th</sup> March at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine's, London, formed the second part of the project. The conference was organised to be a more reflective event with opportunity for questions and discussion.

The objectives were:

- To bring together people from differing religious experience and ethnic background to help understand diversity
- To contribute to the debate on the future of Europe
- To foster active citizenship through understanding of the EU
- To engage with issue of tolerance and values from a religious perspective with special reference to Christian and Muslim dialogue.

At the event some 36 participants actively engaged in discussion about integration and development of the EU. They came from Poland, Belgium, Romania, Slovakia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Finland, France, Greece and the UK. The programme for the day was organised to commence with theories of Values and Identity from Christian and Muslim perspectives.

The keynote speakers were the Rt Revd Dr Michael Nazir Ali, Bishop of Rochester, a Pakistani by birth and an expert in Christian and Muslim dialogue, and Imam Dr A. Sajid from Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony.

The programme of the conference included sharing of an experience and practical examples of how a church is engaged with tolerance and diversity in a social programme helping migrant workers and immigrants to be active citizens in the pluralist and multi ethnic culture of London.

The conference benefited from the presentation of one of the Council of Europe advisers and underlined the importance of education in helping overcome intolerance and promoting understanding, tolerance and active citizenship.

**The programme of the conference can be found at:** <http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/ValuesReligionIdentityprog.pdf>

### **Outcomes**

Participants of the Brussels conference adopted the final communiqué: An Open Letter from Church Leaders to Political Leaders in Europe under the title 'For a Europe Based on Shared Values and a Common Hope.' See the following:

English: <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/openletter13.shtml>

French: <http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/OpenLetterCLFrench.pdf>

German: <http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/OpenLetterCLGerman.pdf>

The letter as the main outcome of the meeting was communicated to the churches in Europe and European political leaders, including Members of the European Commission and the European Parliament. The full documentation of the conference, which includes the programme, all presentations and outcome, is available on the website of the Conference of European Churches. The reports from the conference were presented in church and secular media in a number of European countries from which church leaders participated at the meeting.

The conference was considered as a helpful step in an ecumenical dialogue among the churches in Europe. The conference underlined a need of communication between church leaders and the political leadership.

The content outcome of the conference was not a single clear-cut list of values, which would in a simple way formulate a position of Christian churches to the question of values and identity in Europe. The conference confirmed that in addressing the theme of values it not possible to omit diversity of Church traditions, diversity of historical experience, as well as diversity of cultural and social set-up in different place in Europe.

Contributions presented at the meeting by the church leaders focused on different aspects of the complex question of values confirmed diversity in views on the core elements of the problem. Still, along with diversity, a considerable sense of unity was also evident. It may be not a coincidence that the headline of the ecumenical movement: ‘unity in diversity’ is now broadly used in the wide context of process of European integration. Churches, together with other religions, have much contribute to the successful continuation of the European project.

In the London seminar, the importance of creating meaningful dialogue between religious groups was underlined as a key point. The need to deepen mutual understanding should not be underestimated, especially in these present times of Christian-Muslim tension. Differences as well as commonalities in the value settings between different religious communities were identified. The seminar was one of the first steps in a much-needed and long-term focus on interfaith dialogue. Such activity will need some complex and detailed programmes that will require significant investment. The seminar underlined the need for both religious communities as well as for the EU to pay close attention to the process.

The need for understanding the context and culture is important but the ability of people to appreciate each other and not just tolerate each other is vital. To that end the role of good education in each Member State is essential; education that is not just about basic concepts of faith, but meaningful instruction to enable a better understanding is required for a truly cohesive society. The role of the churches and other faith groups needs to be examined and ways of helping them contribute positively to the debate and society also needs to be encouraged.

## **Recommendations**

The conferences underlined that the question of values lies at the heart of the contemporary dialogue between religions and civilizations. For churches, both individually as well as for the churches’ ecumenical organisations, it is on the basis of the outcomes of the conference that the flowing recommendations are offered:

- Experience shows that any attempt to come with a short and comprehensive definition of the European values cannot be at this stage satisfactory. Much more needs to be done. What is needed is to avoid simplifications and superficialities as well as the temptation of easy answers. It has to be stressed that such a dialogue is not only needed, but is unavoidable in any serious consideration of the future of Europe. Such a debate has to go beyond circles of intellectuals, politicians and academics. **Churches should continue with the effort to expand and deepen the discussion on values in the European context.**
- Values are linked to religions and cultures, as well as to regions, histories and traditions. This is also significant for the experience of churches in Europe. Churches in Europe have a task **to deepen a dialogue with other religions and work together on clarification of the value dimension of Europe.**

For European political institutions, in particular for the European Commission, it is on the bases of the outcomes of the project recommended:

- Values are values in a real sense only if they are part of the fabric of life, if they are firmly anchored in the community and life of individuals. Values lose their meaning if they become detached from everyday life. **The task is to deepen the link between the abstract and sterile debate on European values with the reality of everyday life in grassroots communities. The role of the church needs to be considered.**
- The value dimension in Europe must neither be an exclusive matter for politics, nor for churches and religions, nor for any other individual agent. The cooperation of political institutions with broad civil society is requested for this work. Churches and religions are important partners for such a task. **Deepening of the structural dialogue between European political institutions on the one side and churches and religions on the other one is of crucial importance.**

Commissioner Jan Figel expressed in his contribution to the conference in Brussels an invitation to a broad dialogue on European issues for different sectors of society. He said: 'I am calling on intellectual and spiritual personalities to come out from their professional circles and take a keener interest in society and politics—no matter whether from the left, the right, or the centre.' The project was an input of the churches in Europe to such a dialogue.