



Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa (GEKE)  
Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)  
Communione d'Eglises Protestantes en Europe (CEPE)

**7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the  
Community of Protestant Churches in Europe  
– Leuenberg Church Fellowship –  
Florence, September 20 – 26, 2012**

**Final Report**

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7th General Assembly, 20-26 Sep 2012  
Florence, Italy

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. General**

“Free for the Future – Protestant Churches in Europe” was the theme addressed by the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe – Leuenberg Church Fellowship (CPCE) at its 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, hosted in Florence from 20<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> September 2012 by the Evangelical Waldensian Church – the Union of Methodist and Waldensian Churches and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy.

The previous General Assembly in Budapest, 2006, had emphasized the CPCE’s essence as a fellowship of worship, and practised this to the full. In harmony with the declaration made in the Report of the Presidium that “the fellowship of the churches is most intensely tangible in joint worship”, the Florence gathering was also set within a framework of services of worship, each day’s work being opened and closed with prayer as well as pausing for the daily prayer for peace at midday. The 220 participants, amongst them 95 delegates, were able to experience the impressively authentic Protestant way of life in this predominantly Catholic land, dating back as it does in part even to the pre-Reformation era, as they worshipped together on Sunday in the Waldensian Church and then strolled around the city in groups, and again at the hosts’ evening of celebration, not to mention the many spontaneous exchanges that took place.

The ecumenical importance of the CPCE was quite evident in the words of greeting delivered by General Secretary Olav Fykse Tveit (World Council of Churches), Metropolitan Emmanuel (representing the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and President of the Conference of European Churches), Rev. Douwe Visser (World Communion of Reformed Churches), General Secretary Anthony Peck (European Baptist Federation), Msgr. Matthias Türk (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity) and Rev. Jonathan Gibbs (Church of England). All made pointed reference to the way in which the fellowship with the CPCE has grown and intensified over the years, pressing the need for united witness and service in the face of the current crises afflicting this continent. A concerted effort to be true to the original cause of the Reformation in our own times was considered to be a significant priority for the coming years.

Rosangela Jarjour, General Secretary of the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC) spoke very movingly of the dramatic predicament that currently besets Christians in the Middle East and asked for the support of the CPCE’s member churches in prayer. The Assembly took this opportunity to frame a statement about the situation of Christians in the Middle East (Appendix 3).

It was a particular pleasure for the General Assembly welcome the Protestant Lutheran Church in Ecuador as a new member. The Assembly also appreciated the signing of an agreement with the Conférence des Eglises Protestantes des Pays Latins d’Europe (CEPPLE) through which this community of West and South European churches form a regional group of the CPCE. They join the existing 3 regional groups, the South European

Group, the Northwest Group and the Conference of the churches along the Rhine, as well as the network of churches in Northern Europe.

## **1.2. Work undertaken in Florence**

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

The Presidium highlighted the church fellowship experienced by the member churches, in which the “fellowship in teaching and learning” provided by the doctrinal discussions has played a key role from the very outset, as the very essence of the CPCE’s work in its report. During the period in question the formal statements issued by the CPCE addressing contemporary ethical dilemmas have also played a key role, serving to significantly broaden public awareness of the “Protestant voice in Europe”.

The General Secretary acknowledged the keen involvement of young ecumenists in the work of the CPCE, as reflected in the reports “Stand up for justice” and “Ecclesia semper reformanda”. He also made particular reference to the activities of the regional groups as an “important form of genuine church fellowship”.

The main theological address to the General Assembly was delivered by Co-President of the CPCE, Michael Beintker. He reminded those gathered of the quintessential and perennial foundations laid down by the early Christian meaning of fellowship. Freedom for the future can only be born from commitment to Christ, the presence of the Spirit of God and our love for one another. This meaning of fellowship – as we experience it too in the CPCE – can open the way towards ever converging paths of rapprochement between the churches, in our broader ecumenical relations as well.

Cristina Comencini, well-known film director and author, reflected on the role of women in society and in the church today. She concluded that we do not have freedom in either church or society, if women are not equal to men.

The findings of the doctrinal discussions and other reports compiled over the last six years have been debated with great vigour in the six different study groups here and the proposals for specific new undertakings examined with great care. The conclusions of the study groups have been duly incorporated into this Final Report. The response to these works has certainly prompted the identification of new perspectives for the future.

Two half-day sessions were devoted to the subject “Europe’s Churches Turn to the Future”. Specially appointed experts have assisted the General Assembly in its evaluation of various case studies detailing the reform projects that have already been instigated by individual member churches with a view to contextualising any conclusions within the parameters of the forthcoming Reformation Anniversary. This event is referred to in part 3.5 of this final report. The two-session forum then culminated in discussions that produced the resolution to issue a call ‘Europa Reformata: 500 Years of Reformation in Europe’ (see Appendix 1).

The General Assembly also debated and approved a declaration “Free for the future. Responsibility for Europe” (see Appendix 2).

## **2. Resolutions on the results of the work 2006-2012**

### **2.1. Scripture – Confession - Church**

1. The General Assembly thanks all persons involved in the 2008 consultation and the drafting group for compiling the document “Scripture – Confession - Church”.
2. The General Assembly welcomes the broad discussion of the document amongst the member churches and is grateful for the differentiated comments; their evaluation was taken into account in the final version.
3. The General Assembly receives the document and adopts it.
4. The General Assembly bids the churches to accept the results of this study document and to take the relevant issues into consideration both internally and in discussions with other churches and traditions.
5. The General Assembly recommends that the outstanding issues identified in the final chapter of this document be addressed and duly considered by the new doctrinal conversation entitled “Church Fellowship”.

### **2.2. Ministry – Ordination - Episkopé**

1. The General Assembly thanks all persons involved in the 2009 consultations and the drafting group for considering and for compiling the document "Ministry – Ordination - Episkope".
2. The General Assembly welcomes the broad discussion of the document amongst the member churches and is grateful for the differentiated comments; their evaluation was taken into account in the final version.
3. The General Assembly adopts the statement and the recommendations and commends the accompanying resource material to the churches.
4. The General Assembly invites the churches to consider the statement, and to bring it into their discussions both internally and with other churches and traditions.

### **2.3. „Stand up for Justice“**

1. The General Assembly receives the document "Stand Up for Justice" and conveys its thanks to the study group for compiling the report.
2. The General Assembly welcomes the broad discussion of the document amongst the member churches and conveys its appreciation for the range of views that have been considered and incorporated in the conclusion.
3. The General Assembly regards the document as a guiding contribution to the process of reflecting, commenting and acting on socio-ethical issues and recommends it to the member churches as an affirmation of LA 11: “Christians ... know that God's will, as demand and gift, embraces the whole world. They stand up for justice and peace on earth between individuals and nations.”
4. The General Assembly recommends to the Council to set up a freely accessible digital archive to make available socio-ethical statements of member churches.

## **2.4. Training for the Ordained Ministry**

1. The General Assembly conveys its thanks to those involved in the 2008 and 2010 consultations and to the drafting group for compiling the document “Training for the Ordained Ministry within the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe”.
2. The General Assembly welcomes the broad discussion of the document amongst the member churches and conveys its appreciation for the range of views that have been considered and incorporated in the conclusion.
3. The General Assembly regards the document as a guiding contribution for a common understanding of a good theological training.
4. The General Assembly recommends that the member churches take the document into consideration in relation to any reforms regarding the area of training.
5. The General Assembly asks the Council to lay the foundations for the realization of the recommendations mentioned in the last chapter.

## **2.5. „Anchor in Time“**

1. The General Assembly conveys its thanks to the South Eastern Europe regional group for compiling the study “Anchor in Time – Protestant Worship in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe between Continuity and Change”.
2. The General Assembly recommends the document as an exemplary contribution to the liturgical studies within the CPCE. It underscores the view of the study that CPCE realizes the principle of “reconciled diversity” also in its life of worship. It views the orders of worship that have been celebrated during the General Assembly as well as the hymn book “Colours of Grace” as successful applications of this principle.
3. The General Assembly recommends that observations concerning changes in practice of worship should also be gathered in other regions of the CPCE. The General Assembly requests that the Council respond with the appropriate means to section 7.4 of the report “Conclusions and initiatives for forthcoming attention”.
4. The General Assembly proposes that the key findings of the report “Anchor in Time” be disseminated amongst the member churches of the CPCE in the form of a guide summarising its conclusions, to be produced by the South-Eastern European regional group.

## **2.6. Ecclesia semper reformanda**

1. The General Assembly receives the study “Ecclesia semper reformanda” and conveys its thanks to the study group for compiling the report.
2. The General Assembly requests that the member churches take it into consideration in relation to their continuing or future processes of reform.
3. The General Assembly invites the Council to continue the research on how renewal processes work in the churches. This work should build on the work already conducted by the study group, and aim at giving the churches a possibility to share experiences of church renewal.

4. The General Assembly recommends to the Council to establish a small working group which should explore alternative methodologies to continue research on church renewal (e.g. through partnership and exchange, putting an emphasis on sharing experiences and best practices etc.).

### **3. Resolutions on the fields of work from 2012 onwards**

#### **3.1. Church fellowship**

1. General Assembly requests the Council to initiate a doctrinal conversation on the subject of "Church fellowship". The General assembly asks that focus be given to the positive potential and visibility of church fellowship. It asks for a theological clarification of the binding character ("Verbindlichkeit") and to take into account the constitutional implications of church fellowship based on the LA.
2. The General Assembly asks the Council to ensure that the process takes a wide range of church experiences into account, and includes broad representation and reception of the study process.

#### **3.2. Plurality of Religions**

The General Assembly requests the Council to initiate a study process on the subject of the "plurality of religions", to explore the complex range of interrelated issues and the doctrinal implications. In this context, an empirical study should be initiated which explores the interreligious situation on the ground in the different contexts in which the CPCE member churches operate. Such a study should elucidate both the sociological situation and the churches' current practical and theological response. The Council should ensure that the specific contribution of the Leuenberg approach will be reflected in the study project.

#### **3.3. Inter-church Dialogues**

1. The General Assembly welcomes the establishing of consultations with the Roman Catholic Church on the Leuenberg model of church communion.
2. The General Assembly supports the continuation of conversations with the Anglican churches on the basis of the *Memorandum of affirmation and commitment*.
3. The General Assembly requests the Council to seek appropriate ways of deepening the cooperation with the European Baptist Federation on the basis of the agreement of 2010.
4. The General Assembly requests the Council to seek appropriate ways of continuing consultations with the Orthodox Churches in Europe.
5. The General Assembly requests the Council to with to establish contact Pentecostal churches and charismatic communities and, where appropriate, seek appropriate forms of conversation with them.

6. The General Assembly requests the Council to seek appropriate forms of conversation and cooperation with congregations of migrant Christians. It recommends to closely cooperate in this area with the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME).
7. The General Assembly requests the Council to initiate a consultation in which the member churches can reflect upon their experiences with newly emerging Christian groups.

### **3.4. Europa Reformata**

1. The General Assembly advises the Council to instigate the "Europa reformata: 500 Years of Reformation in Europe" project on the basis of the existing project outline. It requests the Council to take into account whilst working on this project the discussions in the working groups.
2. The General Assembly asks the Council to engage with ecumenical partners, in particular the Roman Catholic Church, in order that the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation can be experienced as a significant contribution to the ecumenical process.

### **3.5. Europe's churches turn to the future**

The General Assembly considered issues pertaining to the subject of the renewal of the Protestant church in Europe in the forum "Europe's Churches Turn to the Future" on 24th and 25th September 2012.

It duly recognizes that many of The CPCE member churches are in the process of conducting spiritual or structural renewal and have started to implement measures aimed at adapting towards the changes in their respective environment.

Even though the particular circumstances of the individual member churches can differ quite considerably, they often stand in need of Spiritual renewal and organisational reform in relation to similar challenges. Therefore the General Assembly recommends that the member churches share more actively than to date the combined experience gathered during reform processes completed so far or in terms of the plans that have already been made for impending renewal.

It requests the Council of the CPCE to engage in further work on the topic of 'Europe's Churches turn to the future' and in particular to examine the following suggestions:

1. To commission a report investigating the importance of the Reformation as an impulse of spiritual renewal in the 21st century;
2. To share in the consultation of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches and the EKD about the question of how the situation of the reformation churches in the present can be clarified, in which to particularly involve the study group who engaged with the theme of 'ecclesia semper reformanda'.
3. To support the member churches in their exchange of good practice established in the course of particularly innovative projects and processes implementing change, for example through encouraging the networking platforms the internet might offer.

### **3.6. Resolutions concerning other areas of activity**

1. The General Assembly requests the Council to commission a report investigating the subject "Education for the Future". The General Assembly suggests that the South-Eastern European regional group might be assigned with this task.
2. In the light of the meeting of members of Protestant synods in January 2012 in Bad Boll, Germany the General Assembly invites the Council to continue to support the joint work of the synodal bodies of the member churches .
3. The General Assembly affirms the decisions of the of the General Assembly in Budapest 2006 for close cooperation in the field of political, social and economic issues in order to strengthen the Protestant voice in Europe. It conveys its thanks to the representative of the CPCE in Brussels and welcomes the joint work with the Commission of Church and Society of CEC.
4. The General Assembly requests the council to consider ways in which the Social Commitment of the Protestant Churches in Europe which is contained in the Study Document "Stand Up For Justice" [p. 49] may be developed further.
5. In order to be as precise as possible when applying terminology which is commonly used in the CPCE, the General Assembly recommends to the Council to initiate the compilation of a Leuenberg Dictionary in which terms and expressions in CPCE's three official languages are collected and explained and their usage in different languages examined.
6. The General Assembly requests the Council to establish a study process on the theology of diaspora. It asks the Council to reflect on how to connect this process with the topic of Gospel and Culture, looking also at cultural identities within the churches, including that of majority and minority churches.
7. The General Assembly requests the Council to examine whether conversations with the European Evangelical Alliance should be begun.

#### 4. Elections: Council, Presidium, General Secretary

The General Assembly elected the CPCE's new Council on 24.9.2012. The following persons are now members of the Council:

Members	Proxies
1. Heetderks, Jan-Gerd Protestant Church in the Netherlands	1. Rieth, Klaus Evangelical Church of Wurttemberg
2. Jørgensen, Kirsten Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark	2. Graff-Kallevåg, Kristin Church of Norway
3. Kopsch, Cordelia Evangelical Church in Hesse and Nassau	3. Killat, Barbara Evangelical Church in Central Germany
4. Locher, Gottfried Dr Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches	4. Hirzel, Martin Dr Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches
5. McPake, John Dr Church of Scotland	5. Bradbury, John Dr United Reformed Church
6. Pöder, Thomas-Andreas Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church	6. Brzóska, Marcin Evangelical Church A.C. in Poland
7. Rudolph, Barbara Evangelical Church in the Rhineland	7. Kayser, Susanne Evangelical Church of Bremen
8. Tarr Cselovszky, Klára Dr Lutheran Church in Hungary	8. Bölcskei, Gusztáv Dr Reformed Church in Hungary
9. Thaarup, Jørgen United Methodist Church, Central Conference Northern Europe	9. Pöll, Lothar United Methodist Church, Central Conference Central and Southern Europe
10 Weber, Friedrich Dr Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brunswick	10. Hauschildt, Friedrich Dr United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany
11. Weinrich, Michael Dr Union of Evangelical Churches	11. Martin, Michael Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria
12. Wieland-Maret, Esther United Protestant Church in France	12. Gajewski, Pawel Dr Waldensian Evangelical Church in Italy
13. Zikeli, Daniel Dr Evangelical Church A.C. in Romania	13. Boukis, Dimitrios Greek Evangelical Church

The inaugural meeting of the Council took place on 25.9.2012, in which it elected the tripartite Presidium comprising Dr Friedrich Weber (Presiding President), Dr Gottfried Locher and Dr Klára Tarr Cselovszky.

It also re-elected Dr Michael Bünker as General Secretary.

## **Appendix 1: Europa Reformata: 500 years of Reformation in Europe**

The year 2017 marks the start of Protestant Christendom's celebrations of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. The outbreak of this ecclesiastical, social and intellectual movement sent out waves of resonance and repercussions throughout the whole world that still reverberate even to this day. The persona and works of Martin Luther were to play a pivotal role therein. His criticism of indulgence in the year 1517 and the broad debate surrounding his Ninety-Five Theses provided the central focus for a movement of such enormous convictional force that it would propel the Church onto a faster, more profound and far-reaching course of renewal. The Reformation profoundly affected the history of Europe and its resident Churches. The efforts to reform the one Church of Jesus Christ based on the gospel of justification by faith alone gave rise to the Protestant Churches.

The Protestant churches' "starting point was a new experience of liberation and assurance in the power of the Gospel. In taking a stand for the truth as they recognized it, the Reformers found themselves in common opposition to the church traditions of that time. They were at one therefore confessing that the life and doctrine of the Church are to be measured by the original and pure testimony of the Gospel in scripture. They were at one in testifying to the free and unconditional grace of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for all those who believe in this promise. They were at one in confessing that the practice and shape of the church are only to be determined by the commission to deliver their testimony to the world, and that the Word of the Lord remains sovereign over every human ordering of the Christian community. In all this, together with the whole of Christendom, they received and confessed anew the faith expressed in the creeds of the early Church, in the Triune God and in the divine-human nature of Jesus Christ." (Leuenberg Agreement, point 4).

The churches of the Reformation always shared this common witness, irrespective of the existence any differences and contradictions between them. From this stems the Church community that in 1973 formally declared itself as such with the Agreement of Reformist Churches in Europe and in which they recognize their calling to common witness and common service in today's world. The Methodist churches, which first came into existence in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, also share the fundamental beliefs of the Reformation.

The Gospel brings a breath of fresh air, banishes fear, gives new life, grants freedom, opens our eyes to the needs of others and banishes mournful spirits. Whenever we experience this amongst us, it awakens the impulses of the Reformation within us. It is when the Christian churches allow themselves to be led by the Gospel that the Reformation is properly honoured.

The Gospel inspires reflection within our minds and souls: What does it mean to be Protestant these days? How does Protestantism inspire fascination amongst others? But also: In what ways do we perhaps hinder the Gospel? How can we become more welcoming towards others? Which different impulses can be drawn from the Reformation for the shaping of the modern day Church? And finally: What does reformist renewal

signify for the future of the Church and the co-existence and co-operation between Christian churches?

On the path towards the forthcoming anniversary of the Reformation we should carry these experiences and questions with us. The General Assembly of the CPCE in Florence encourages its member churches to be motivated by their experiences of the Gospel and seek inspiration from the questions that it raises. It calls for the joint celebration of the Anniversary of the Reformation 2017 and offers assistance under the auspices of the project “Europa reformata: 500 Years of Reformation” to develop campaigns, projects and joint ventures.

The aim of the Reformation was to renew the one Church of Jesus Christ. For 500 years now the Reformation has challenged all Christendom, transcending any confessional divides and borders, to seek the meaning of the Reformation for the “One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church”.

And far beyond our Church walls, the commemoration of the Reformation should also inspire throughout all of Europe renewed public engagement with the spirit of the Reformation and fresh dialogue addressing its dynamic cultural and social forces.

Florence, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2012

## **Appendix 2: Free for the future. Responsibility for Europe**

### *Statement of the General Assembly*

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) gathered in Florence on the occasion of its 7th General Assembly. It convened at time when the process of European integration is facing a fundamental crisis. This crisis will have a significant impact on Europe's citizens, society, democracy as well as the process of European integration. This situation prompts the General Assembly to issue this address not only to the member churches of the CPCE but to the general public throughout Europe as well.

“Free for the Future” is the motto of the CPCE's General Assembly in Florence. God bestowed this freedom upon us through Jesus Christ, whose message inspires faith and liberates us all for responsible service in the World. Thus the Protestant churches of Europe committed themselves in the Leuenberg Agreement to promote justice on earth and peaceful relations amongst individual people and between nations. “To do this they have to join with others in seeking rational and appropriate criteria and play their part in applying these criteria.” (Leuenberg Agreement: 11).

As a consequence of the current European crisis many people are afraid of the future. Many Europeans are affected by unemployment, falling income levels, cuts to welfare services, austerity measures that affect the financing of public services, and growing levels of poverty. One of the most concerning developments is the extremely high levels of youth unemployment that are emerging in many countries. Deep-seated existential fears and a complete lack of future prospects are driving large crowds onto the streets.

The General Assembly of the CPCE is well aware that there are no simple answers to this crisis, that there is no single, noble cure that can simply be conjured up now that the European economy and financial markets are so closely bound up with their global counterparts. The General Assembly also wishes to express its respect for the political leaders who have been placed under enormous pressure by this crisis and who carry a heavy responsibility for the future and to them as to assure prayers for them

Within our own countries, but also the world over, a deep chasm is opening up between rich and poor. The victims of this crisis are to be found not only in Europe but scattered across the globe. Any proposals aimed at salvaging the situation must also be carefully evaluated in terms of their efficacy in assisting those people and societies most deeply affected; their potential effect on the stability of European integration, and their contribution towards the promotion of global solidarity.

This profound crisis has multiple causes and diverse ramifications. The following aspects are of particular importance to the General Assembly:

### ***Gathering Courage to Face the Truth***

Christian belief derives from the experience that the truth liberates you for the future. It abides by the promise made in the Bible that: “the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). Their faith in this promise leads the member churches of the CPCE to the conviction that the truth about the extent and consequences of the current crisis in Europe is not only something with which the people can actually cope, but that this knowledge can have a

liberating effect. Only if we have the courage to face the truth can we open up new avenues for decisive action and reveal fresh perspectives for the future. On this basis the General Assembly seeks to encourage the leading figures in politics and the economy and indeed Europe's citizens as a whole to face what clearly might be very uncomfortable truths.

Courage to face the truth renders us free to challenge any claims asserting that the current political strategy is the only option. Whilst there may well be certain situations in which one particular solution seems quite obvious, nonetheless an ideology that espouses only sole options is the antithesis of one that encourages truth and freedom. It runs the real risk of ruining any chance of future freedom. The admission of one's own perplexity or uncertainty should not be considered a sign of political weakness, but is instead a sign of strength. This is precisely the way in which people's faith in politics can be reinforced, a faith without which the European project is doomed. This crisis will not be solved overnight. The main objective in facing the continuing crisis must be to generate new scope for creative action aimed at creating a society that can offer a greater degree of justice, solidarity and harmony.

This call for honesty and integrity is simultaneously aimed at the churches themselves, who after all are not situated on the periphery of society, politics and the economy, but are themselves protagonists in their own right. For this reason the General Assembly encourages its member churches to critically evaluate their own involvement in this crisis. Only then can they speak with any credibility towards others.

### ***Reinforcing Democracy***

This crisis is exerting enormous pressure on *democracy and democratic procedures* to take decisive action. The impression has been created that national parliaments or governments are no longer free to make these decisions independently, nor even the European institutions, but that the real power is exerted by the financial markets. People feel increasingly at the mercy of decisions reached by distant forces. This development is due, not least, to the political decisions of recent years to increasingly liberalise the financial sector and withdraw previous forms of public control.

The General Assembly is convinced that the only way to overcome this crisis in an effective and sustainable manner is via the application of stronger transparent and democratic procedures at all levels of the state throughout Europe. Protestantism considers full participation and active involvement in decision-making processes as the absolute prerequisite for good neighbourly relations and peaceful co-operation within Europe.

### ***Considering the Consequences for Society***

Until now the proposals made for countering the crisis have failed to sufficiently consider its *social consequences* or the social hardship caused by the very strategies that have been adopted thus far. The repercussions of concentrating on austerity measures and

budgetary discipline, however necessary and desirable the latter might be deemed, have proved disastrous in immediate social terms throughout the countries affected.

The General Assembly welcomes the European Council's decision from June 2012 to invest €120 billion of EU structural funds in a "Compact for Growth and Jobs", but still misses any systematic consideration of the potential social repercussions of political decisions, as indeed formally demanded in the social clause of the Treaty on European Union itself (article 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union).

This imbalance is particularly obvious within the recent formulation of the *European economic governance* of the EU, which over the last two years has placed overt emphasis on savings and budgetary consolidation way beyond any consideration of socio-political goals. The formal aim of establishing a "highly competitive social market economy" (as declared in the Treaty on European Union, article 3.3) requires corresponding regulatory procedures, however, that addresses both economic and social concerns to the same degree.

### ***Fair Taxation Policy***

Generally too little regard is paid to *Fiscal policy* in comparison with austerity measures in consideration of the instruments available for the consolidation of budgets.

The General Assembly reminds all concerned that our societies and states live from the taxes and solidarity of all members, and that all citizens have equal obligations towards the common good. For example these times of crisis, and particularly such high levels of youth unemployment, clearly highlight yet again the importance of public investment in the general sphere of education.

It is the Christian belief that the strong can and should contribute and bear more than the weak. A higher level of taxation on high income and assets – even temporarily – or a one-off levy on such would make quite appropriate measures under these current circumstances as a means of distributing the burden of this crisis more fairly. At the same time, effective and serious measures must be undertaken for the detection and combating of tax evasion and fraud, and the workings of the tax administration authorities need both reinforcing and expanding.

### ***Regulation of the Financial Markets***

The financial, economic and national debt crisis has arisen for various different reasons in the individual states throughout Europe, and these aggravating factors must be subject to careful analysis and suitable correction. However, any policy that consistently relies on accruing debts to an extent that will inevitably burden and severely hamper the welfare of future generations is unethical. Nonetheless, we must not forget that the current credit crisis ultimately stems from the crisis in the *financial markets*: the rescuing of stricken banks has, along with various economic stimulus programmes, falling tax revenues and climbing social spending, led to an unprecedented increase in national debt in every country that has been hit by the crisis. As such, it should go without saying that the future

regulation of banks and the financial market should be considered of key importance for the future of, not just the European Union, but the continent as a whole.

The Protestant ethos views freedom and responsibility as intrinsically linked. This fundamental relationship between risk and accountability must therefore be restored in the financial sector as well. In addition, the financial sector and those who have gained from the crisis should be more closely involved in its remedy. It is an absolutely unacceptable ongoing state of affairs that profits are privatised but losses inevitably passed on to the whole of society!

The financial and banking sectors require continuous monitoring and ethically-minded regulation by efficient and enforceable means. One tangible step in this direction is the financial transaction tax that is envisaged for as many participating states as possible. This could be further improved by means of a European Banking Union that would provide common regulations and a joint supervisory body.

### ***No to Resurgent to Nationalism***

The crisis has magnified people's general mistrust towards the European institutions, in many countries blowing fresh wind in the sails of nationalist and populist tendencies and political parties. We must be careful to make a clear distinction between a state's right to self-determination and the protection of its genuine national interests and these aggressive forms of nationalism that incite raw competition and animosity between different nationalities as well as the repression of ethnic minorities. It was precisely as a counterforce to the *nationalism* that arose in the 19th century, eventually wreaking such devastating havoc during the 20th century that the process of European integration was conceived. For this reason the Protestant churches – who in part were deeply embroiled themselves in this nationalism – are strongly connected with this integration process and offer it their full support. In this context the General Assembly also refers to the CPCE's 2001 report entitled "Church – People – State – Nation".

### ***Rethinking our Economic Model***

Alongside these contemporary and immediate considerations, many Christians are pondering the broader possibility that this crisis might actually warrant a reconsideration of the prevailing *economic model* that defines any increase in prosperity primarily in terms of economic growth and automatically extends the logic of market forces to all fields of life. The General Assembly welcomes any ideas and discussions that suggest different economic approaches and alternative ways of life amongst the churches and their congregations as well as throughout broader society as a whole, such as those identified in the report "Stand Up for Justice" presented at the General Assembly. This does not represent an outright rejection of the principles of the social market economy, which Protestantism does not view purely as an economic paradigm, but in much broader terms as embodying a whole system of intrinsic values. Rather, it presents the argument for a turn towards greater distributive justice, guaranteeing meaningful and secure employment, providing stable social systems, offering adequate and appropriate public services and, ultimately, establishing sustainable economies that preserve creation.

### ***Call for European Solidarity***

To date the European Union has made an important contribution towards peace, freedom and prosperity in justice throughout Europe. The CPCE is also committed to these aims itself. It seeks to strengthen the partnerships between churches and their congregations and communities right across Europe, and in so doing strengthen the solidarity that is felt from one end of the continent to the other. At present church partnerships and ecumenical co-operation are more important than ever as examples of the way that we can live together in Europe, providing, as they do, a valuable means of promoting understanding and solidarity in the midst of this crisis. The major challenges now emerging in the 21st century – such as globalisation, climate change, demographic shifts, changes to the world economy, and political transformation in Europe's neighbouring regions – all call for a free and united Europe whose capacity for solidarity does not end at the borders of each individual state, but instead stretches even beyond Europe's own continental frontiers.

*Florence, 26.09. 2012*

### **Appendix 3: Statement on the situation of Christians in the Middle East**

“Christianity is freedom” – Philip Melanchthon’s formulation of 1521 has become a motto for Protestant churches. Wherever in the world people are striving for freedom, they can be sure of the sympathy and support of the Protestant churches. Therefore many Protestant Christians in Europe have very much welcomed the “Arab Spring” in various countries of the Middle East, because they sense in this movement the articulation of people’s justified desire for freedom.

But in recent months we, the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, became increasingly worried by many reports from our partners in the countries of the Middle East.

Protestant Churches in Europe are connected with the churches and Christians in the Middle East in a multitude of ways.

The CPCE has an intensive partnership with the “Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical Churches”, a federation of 17 mostly Protestant Christian churches in the region.

The member churches of the CPCE are connected with churches and Christians in the Middle East through partnerships, diaconal projects and many personal relations.

As the CPCE we observe that Christians in the Middle East share an interest in, and a striving for, the freedom of their fellow citizens of different faith. But now they are worried about the constitutional, legal and political developments in their countries, which seem to threaten their participation in society and their religious freedom.

Christians in Syria are especially deeply worried about the threat to basic human rights and security in the present civil war. As well as this they fear an impending loss of religious and cultural plurality in Syria and the loss of the principle of the participation of all groups in their society.

As the CPCE we are deeply concerned because it is often difficult to recognize in the politics of our governments a concern for the life of our Christian sisters and brothers in Syria, for their religious freedom, and for the preserving of religious and cultural diversity in Syria.

We ask the governments in Europe to strengthen their advocacy for legal certainty, full participation in society and full religious freedom for Christians and churches, as well of all other religious minorities, in the countries of the Middle East.

We ask our member churches and all Christians in Europe to inform the public about the very difficult situation of Christians in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East – so as to provide a more comprehensive picture than is available in the media.

We ask our member churches and all Christians in Europe to fully support the Christians in the Middle East, and all others who suffer there from violence, legal uncertainty and restrictions on their freedom.

We especially ask our member churches and all Christians in Europe to pray for our Christian sisters and brothers and for all people in the Middle East and to ask God to help them in their suffering and their struggle for freedom.