What future for Europe?
Reaffirming the European project as building a community of values
An open letter of CEC to churches and partner organisations in Europe and an invitation to dialogue and consultation

Summary

Fifteen years ago, the historic Charta Oecumenica, brought together the churches of the Conference of European Churches and CCEE in a bold pronouncement in support of the European project. Here they proclaimed, "without common values, unity cannot endure." Today, less than a generation later, such a call to common values and unity seems alien and rare in European societies. Political and economic disintegration seem the new norm. Europeans are losing confidence in the European project, mistrust of politicians and the structures they serve is growing, and policies are reduced to national interests.

In this open letter, CEC returns to the fundamental question of common values and how these are expressed in Europe today. The existence and flourishing of the European Union is central to this discussion, but we will also look beyond its borders. The text elaborates on the overall context of and historical perspectives on European development. It takes into account the achievements of Europe, especially those that go beyond economic cooperation and the common market. These include, support for solidarity mechanisms, free travel under the Schengen agreement, and the student exchange programme Erasmus. At the same time, the text raises concern about the multiple and interrelated crises facing Europe today. The influx of migrants and refugees, violent conflicts and terrorist attacks, economic crises and growing Euroscepticism all threaten the European project and development of common values. By way of response, this open letter elaborates a theological perspective to these issues, including reflection on koinonia and diaconia, and encourages churches to make a positive contribution in building a common European home.

In evaluating Europe's current challenges as part of our efforts leading to the next CEC Assembly, which will take place in 2018, the CEC Governing Board:

- Issues this open letter to churches in Europe on the situation in the continent, which outlines its vision of Europe with regard to the EU and shares its concerns about the future of this historical European project in the present circumstances;
- Reaffirms its understanding of the EU as a community of values pursuing human dignity, peace, reconciliation, justice, the rule of law, democracy, the respect for human rights, solidarity and sustainability;
- Encourages CEC Member Churches and all Christians in Europe to step up efforts in making such Christian virtues as respect for others, solidarity, diaconia and building up a community more visible in public life;
- Calls churches in Europe to an intensive discussion on the future of our continent, the role of the European Union and our vision of shared values;
- Invites CEC Member Churches and partner organisations to react to this letter in considering the specific situation in different parts of the continent and in contributing to a consultative and participatory process leading to the next CEC Assembly.

I.   Introduction

*"On the basis of our Christian faith, we work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe,
in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance,
participation and solidarity prevail."*

Charta Oecumenica

In 2001 the churches in Europe jointly and boldly pronounced in Charta Oecumenica a̶ support for a process destined to bring Europe closer together. Churches in the same document stated that *"without common values, unity cannot endure."*[1] Now, 15 years later, we find ourselves in a situation in which increasingly vocal political parties and groupings argue against further political and economic integration on our continent. What seemed a logical position 15 years ago seems less evident today. Rather, we see a growing body of opinion that has lost faith in the promise of a united Europe, that distrusts political elites, and that would like to renationalise policies.

In this paper, CEC makes an effort to analyse recent developments in Europe in relation to the question how these affect jointly held basic values. The focus will be on the European Union, and the deep challenges facing the EU today. At the same time, it is obvious that development in the EU cannot be considered in isolation. The broader picture of Europe as a whole, which includes both EU as well as countries outside of the Union has to be taken into account. Fragmentation of Europe becomes an increasingly serious challenge for the continent.

In this historic moment the European Union, which covers the major part of the continent and is responsible for developments that have considerable impact on other parts of the continent, is at a crossroads. We must work together to foster hope and cultivate constructive solutions to our common problems. This open letter is a call to join in this process, to outline a new vision for Europe – a home for all of us, building on the past and looking to the future with renewed hope.

II.   Context

*"Respect for human dignity, peace, justice, freedom, tolerance,
participation and solidarity can be maintained in times of change"*

Problems arising in an increasingly globalised and interdependent world need global and international approaches to be effective. Climate change and pollution, for example, do not stop at national borders. International crime and terrorism need international responses. Global economic problems need globally coordinated solutions. It is clear that individual countries are less effective in tackling their problems when they act on their own than when they coordinate with other countries. They need partnerships and networks to amplify their voice and strengthen their influence.

More and more people disagree with the view that global issues can best be addressed through global approaches. They point to the fact that only small groups of people have reaped the benefits of globalisation and that the majority of the population bears the brunt of the negative outcomes of this process. Almost everywhere in the world, globalisation has been accompanied by growing inequalities and eroding

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1.   For the full text, see Charta Oecumenica, the joint document of CEC and CCEE (Strasbourg 2001).

prospects for the middle and lower class. In addition, many feel that they are subject to global forces that they cannot control and threaten their identities. Therefore, it is not surprising that the ideal of sovereign independence retains—and even regains—an important appeal. Many people have become suspicious of globalisation and have come to view those who argue for economic and political integration as out-of-touch elites which promote their own agenda while neglecting the people's agenda. As a consequence, we see a growing emphasis on national identity, sovereignty, and a renationalisation of policies. A key question in this context is how the obvious need for international cooperation and joint policy making can be reconciled with the legitimate desire of many people to own and control policies that affect their daily lives.

It is clear that within the churches and between Christians different opinions exist on detailed policy questions and on how to organise ourselves in Europe. Also on bigger issues such as to stay in or leave the European Union, Christians find themselves on different sides of the divide. Such differences are perfectly legitimate.

For the Conference of European Churches (CEC) the key question is how we can make sure that the fundamental values that should guide political processes on our continent—respect for human dignity, peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation, solidarity, and sustainability—can be maintained in times of change. CEC holds that no compromises can be made with regard to these basic values. Even if policy choices may differ, unity in Europe is rooted in these values.

III. Historical Perspective
"Pray for, dream of, and proclaim the possibility of a better way."

After the Second World War, our continent was reeling from multiple crises. Food shortages were endemic, there were vast flows of displaced people—not just prisoners of war and concentration camp victims—trying to find their way home, to reunite with family, or to find a new home because their pre-War house was no longer there. Major and costly reconstruction was needed for most of the great cities on the continent. Virtually every national economy was in need of a financial bailout. Germany alone had half of its national debt written off. Soon after the War, the continent was split along ideological lines, East and West, and a Cold War developed.

It was in this febrile atmosphere in the mid-twentieth century that a small multinational group of devout Christian statesmen came together and dared to pray for, dream of, and proclaim the possibility of a better way—a way for the diverse peoples of Europe to live and prosper together in peace. This hope could only be realised if people and nations were prepared to accept common values emerging from the cultural, religious, and humanist inheritance of Europe; values that are also at the heart of the Gospel message. Love your enemies, forgive others as you are forgiven, be in solidarity with the poor and the down-trodden, and share with your neighbour. It is to this heritage we turn as we continue our efforts for reconciliation and solidarity in Europe today.

So when French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman made his famous declaration on 9 May 1950 in favour of European cooperation, it was met with a positive response from German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, Italian Premier Alcide de Gasperi, Belgian Foreign Minister Paul Henri Spaak and many others. At its heart was a message of forgiveness on

behalf of France and the offering of an olive branch to Germany. This was in the form of a new multinational entity to conduct the affairs of Europe in which the two long time protagonist nations stand together as equal partners. This early model still reminds us of the power of dialogue in resolving tensions.

The Coal and Steel Community was established in 1951 and brought together the coal and steel sectors of previous enemies, thereby making hidden rearmament impossible. This initial Community transformed first into the European Economic Community (1957) and later into the European Union (1993). From the initial six core Member States, it succeeded in enlarging with other countries.[2] The institutions and structures originally devised for the six nations were revised with occasional treaty adaptation with the Treaties of Rome (1957), Maastricht (1993) and Lisbon (2007). These adaptations served to contain disagreements between nations in the negotiating room and away from the battlefield and entrenching respect for the rule of law, democracy and human rights across the continent. All this happened in the context of mutual dependence between the EU and the Council of Europe, which provides among other things underpinning for activities of the Union in several areas. Council of Europe also offers a platform for cooperation and sharing in a much broader geographical area and provides an image of a much broader Europe than the EU. Cooperation with the Council of Europe and its European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg is essential for the EU.

IV.   **Achievements**
"The European project, in its various manifestations, stands as an example of what can be done through reconciliation, stability and prosperity."

In the history of Europe, people living on our continent have had devastating experiences with ideologies claiming to set clearly defined cultural, ethnic and religious or pseudo-religious standards which apply to everybody. Therefore, the unification of most of Europe in peace and freedom since the Second World War and for the first time since the Middle Ages, is a major historical achievement. Also in the area of human rights, progress has been made. The European Convention on Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights, the European Social Charter and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights are all milestones for Europe. The European project, in its various manifestations, stands as an example of what can be done through reconciliation, stability and prosperity.

The European Union with its undergirding values and framework for cooperation and common action was a key factor in overcoming undemocratic and totalitarian political regimes, which ruled for a substantial part of the 20th century in the east and south of the continent. The EU was also a key factor in integrating countries from these parts of the continent into the new model of collaboration and sharing.

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2. It needs to be acknowledged that reasons for other European countries to join the community have not always coincided with the aim of original six Member States. Economic reasons have in later accession rounds played an increasingly dominant role. For further elaboration of the argument see for example European Integration – A way Forward?, Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches, 2009

On its own territory, the EU has promoted solidarity between rich and poor regions through cohesion policies and the accompanying funds (such as the European Social Fund). A number of EU financial instruments helped in the development of most disadvantaged and poor regions. Solidarity between urban and rural areas has been promoted through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), however imperfect the CAP may be. The social *acquis* of the EU in fields such as equality between women and men, health and safety at work, social security for mobile workers within the EU, is considerable.

The twinning of towns and villages across the EU and student exchange programmes such as Erasmus, as well as free movement of persons in the Schengen zone are among the most appreciated successes of the EU. Universities from 28 EU Member States, plus Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein, as well as candidate countries FYROM and Turkey, participate in the Erasmus programme. From its beginning in 1987 the programme has supported more than 3 million students. The Schengen agreement includes EU Member States (except Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Ireland, Romania, and the UK) and non-EU states Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein. Projects like these have brought people in participating countries together, promoted mutual understanding, and gave meaning to the European cooperation at the grassroots level.

At a global level, the EU runs the world's biggest emergency humanitarian aid budget (ECHO) while the EU and its Member States are also major players in the area of development cooperation (particularly through its development budgets and the European Development Fund). Regarding climate change and nature protection the EU plays a leadership role. Last, but not least the EU has led several peacekeeping operations in different parts of the world.

In general the EU provides the institutional contexts where problems that matter to citizens that Member States cannot readily tackle on their own, are addressed. This is often in a spirit which is mindful of the fact that more can be achieved together than as individual countries which act on their own. Through regular and transparent dialogue with these institutions, we work to address the challenges facing Europe democratically and openly.

V. **Europe at a crossroads: Reimagine Europe and reaffirm core values**
"We are at a crossroads in European history. The very future of developing common EU policies based on interdependence and on reconciled diversity is at stake."

By establishing the European Union as a supranational entity, the founders of the EU wanted to overcome the trap of nationalism that twice in half a century led Europe to disastrous wars. The integration of Europe, as the European Union, was a visionary project. It went beyond reconciling states and aspired to unite the peoples of Europe around the notion of a "community of shared values." In 1990, the then President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, even called upon churches and religions to actively contribute to creating 'the heart and soul of Europe.' In more recent documents such as the Charter on Fundamental Rights (proclaimed in 2000) and the Treaty of Lisbon (2009), the shared values on which the Union is built were re-emphasised.

Lately, however, EU political leaders and many citizens have ceased to proclaim, and are even contradicting values that underpin the EU. For many people the European Union has become a mechanistic, technocratic institution, a bureaucratic project, remote from daily concerns of citizens. Something impenetrable, cumbersome, and costly. Popular support for the EU is rapidly declining. This has been aggravated when national leaders in a number of occasions refer to EU institutions as being responsible for all that is going wrong, and fail to attribute to the EU what is going well. If there is joint policy making in the EU nowadays, is seems that it is based less on a joint vision and more on a simple cost-benefit analysis of individual Member States.

Many of the values which are seen as having contributed to the shaping of Europe during the past sixty years or so, such as solidarity with the weak and respect for human rights, seem to evaporate under the pressure of multiple crises. The churches in Europe must seek to uphold these values as an indispensable basis for justice and peace on our continent.

We are at a crossroads in European history. The very future of developing common EU policies based on interdependence and on reconciled diversity is at stake. This idea has, over the years, contributed to a Europe which has largely lived in peace, and which pursues a growing degree of economic integration and social justice.

Facing such a situation, we need to reimagine Europe as a whole and the EU in particular, reaffirm the core values of the historic project and reassess these in view of the developments which have taken place during the past sixty years. What are the values that should be at the core of European identity? How do we handle the tensions that exist between the desire for sovereignty and homogeneity on the one hand, and European cooperation and cultural diversity on the other hand? What does this mean for the future of the European Union and for the future of the continent as a whole? What kind of Europe and European Union are necessary to live up to the common values which the churches identified in the Charta Oecumenica?

VI.   **Multiple and interacting crises**

Europe in general and the European Union in particular is facing multiple crises. Some are global (such as the economic down turn) and geopolitical in nature (such as the wars in Syria and Iraq, and the 'frozen conflict' in eastern Ukraine). Other crises are due to issues that are more directly related to EU policies, (such as the Euro crisis) and the lack of an effective EU-wide policy on refugees who want to enter the EU. These simultaneously occurring crises impact the continent in a dramatic way. For the first time in decades, some of the fundamental achievements and tenets of the EU are under threat. Rather than rising to the challenges, the EU is cracking under the strain. A sense of crisis mounting, distrust growing, and the EU unable to respond effectively, countries are increasingly inclined to act unilaterally.

Violent conflicts and terrorist attacks

The first crisis with which Europe is confronted is violent geopolitical conflicts, including those in Syria and Iraq, and in Ukraine. The implications of these conflicts in the European

Union is a rising numbers of refugees and recent terror attacks across Europe. As a result, one would expect that the European Union would try to play a major role in ending or even preventing these conflicts. This could be achieved by continuous and intensified diplomatic initiatives and by making sure that arms exports do not fuel the conflicts even further. Instead, the European Union has adopted a rather passive attitude. Regarding the conflict in the Ukraine the EU has been more active, but it failed to prevent difficulties that have led to tensions between the Union and Russia. This situation illustrates the weakness of the EU in developing coherent common foreign policies (through the European External Action Service).

Besides the violence of wars, Europe has also been struck by the violence of several recent terrorist attacks in Spain, the United Kingdom, France, and Belgium. Although it will probably never be possible to eradicate terrorism altogether, it is clear that effective cross border cooperation between intelligence and police services are a prerequisite to counter terrorism in an age of globalisation. It is clear that these developments deeply challenge the EU as an organisation that has peace-making as one of its fundamental values.

Migration

The biggest challenge currently facing the EU is how to respond to the high numbers of refugees, mostly arriving in the southern European countries that were hardest hit by the economic crisis since 2008. This is mainly, but not exclusively, a result of violent conflicts in Europe's neighbourhood. It appears to be very difficult to find a common response to this challenge. International law requires Member States to examine every asylum application lodged on EU territory. Rather than sharing the responsibility and investing in the Common European Asylum System, EU Member States are blaming each other for creating pull factors, as was the case for Italy with the Search and Rescue Operation Mare Nostrum, or Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel for welcoming all refugees. The European Commission's proposals for sharing the responsibility and addressing issues of refugee reception, while requiring negotiations, were dismissed by a considerable number of Member States. In order to reduce numbers of arrivals, the EU and Turkey adopted a deal in March 2016. According to this agreement all newly arriving irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands will be returned to Turkey; and for every Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU. This deal has been seriously criticised by the United Nations, international and national NGOs and churches for being incompatible with international law.

Churches have advocated for safe passages into Europe —including more resettlement of refugees from countries of first asylum, such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey; as well as more generous family reunification, humanitarian visas or lifting of visa requirements. This could—combined with legal labour migration opportunities—drastically reduce the loss of human lives at the EU´s borders and contribute to more

orderly migration. Detailed proposals were elaborated ecumenically by Christian organisations already in 2014.[3]

While the European Commission has proposed to change the Dublin Regulation, there appears to be unwillingness in many Member States to modify the Dublin Regulation's underlying principle requiring that asylum claims be registered in the first EU state entered. This puts a heavy burden on southern states bordering the Mediterranean, which are the first point of arrival from North Africa and the Middle East.

Although international law demands that Europe offers protection to those in need and therefore grants the possibility for every person arriving in Europe to ask for asylum, harsh deterrents adopted by some countries may even become the norm. Europe's politics face a clash of values. On the one hand the moral and legal obligation to offer protection to those in need, and on the other the political task of ensuring orderly movement and procedures to and in the EU. With anti-immigrant sentiments currently growing, this clash is likely to intensify in the near future.

Efforts to try to find a common response have led to bitter disputes and tensions between and within EU Member States. The Schengen agreement, permitting passport-free travel across much of the EU and other participating countries, as one of the most visible manifestations of European unity, has been put under pressure. Border controls have already been imposed unilaterally between some Member States. In spite of all its human, economic as well as symbolic importance, the future of Schengen is now in doubt. While this is attributed to the continuing arrivals of refugees and migrants from the Middle East and North Africa, it also shows a considerable degree of mistrust among EU Member States. If EU leaders are to save Schengen, they must demonstrate a degree of unity and political will that has hitherto been lacking. They would need to agree to common procedures, and promote trust among Member States and assist each other.

The present situation is extremely urgent. It does immeasurable harm to the soul of Europe to ward off victims of violence and terror by fire-arms at border fences, or let people drown in the Mediterranean. Solidarity with refugees is a consequence of Christian faith and our commitment to working towards a just and compassionate society.[4] Therefore, the present predicament of refugees and migrants is a matter of grave concern for CEC.

Economic developments and Euro crisis

The third crisis to list in the catalogue of Europe's current woes is the economic recession triggered by the banking collapse which started in the USA in 2008. This resulted in large parts of the EU remaining sunk in a semi-depression with high unemployment and unsustainable public finances, resulting in severe austerity measures that hit people experiencing poverty the most.

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3. See the recommendations:
   http://www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/20_Areas_of_Work/01_Refugee_Protection/2014-11-20 Christian_Group_Recomm_for_safe_legal_paths_to_protection_final.pdf
4. Statement of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) on the situation in Europe, Brussels, 23 April 2016

In addition, the EU faces a monetary crisis that has already lasted for more than seven years. The brinkmanship policies characterising negotiations with Greece in the course of 2015 are an indication of the volatility of the Eurozone. Rather than uniting the countries of the Eurozone, the Euro is causing tensions between countries and a permanent solution to these is not yet in sight. On the contrary, Greece's decision to accept yet another austerity package has made the Eurozone look increasingly like a trap rather than a promising perspective for prospective members of the zone. The Greeks are faced with a serious dilemma: if the situation in their country shows that "there is no alternative" but to obey the rules of a monetary union, it means that democratic choices for voters are limited. This does not bode well and it is not a sustainable situation. The Eurozone cannot indefinitely survive as a half-completed project—a monetary without an economic union. There is, therefore, a real risk of a return of a Euro crisis in the not too distant future. This would again intensify the strain between democratic sovereignty on the one hand, and joint economic and monetary policies on the other hand. It would also again be a challenge to the principle of solidarity between countries and people in the EU.

Euroscepticism

In several EU Member States, Euroscepticism is on the rise. In some countries this has given rise to political parties and groupings which argue for their country to leave the Union. Several EU Member States (e.g., Greece, the Netherlands, and Hungary) have decided to use the instrument of referenda to consult their citizens on issues related to the European Union. The most far-reaching referendum has been called by the UK government, due to take place on 23 June 2016, on whether the UK should stay in or leave the Union.

A key word in these debates is sovereignty. Those who argue for their country to leave the EU, say that they would like to regain national sovereignty, whereas those who would like to remain in the EU argue that more sovereignty will lead to less influence on European and world affairs. The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby calls in this regard for an in-depth public debate, in which Christian faith should play a role:

> *How can we revitalise ideas such as sovereignty and subsidiarity—ideals formed out of Christian faith whose political dimensions capture their meaning only in part—and help encourage a clearly values-based approach to Britain's future relationship with the EU; one that includes, but does not end with, economic and political perspectives? We are going to try and make . . . a helpful contribution to that debate.*[5]

The dilemma between sovereignty and interdependence will, most likely, continue to be discussed in the EU for some time to come. It is clear that if a country puts the full weight on sovereignty and decides to leave the EU, this could plunge the EU into a deeper crisis.

Democratic deficit

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5. Reimagining Europe, a joint initiative of Church of England and Church of Scotland, http://www.reimaginingeurope.co.uk/learning-to-disagree-well-on-europe/

Several EU Member States are witnessing an emerging divide between the views of the political elite, who are broadly in favour of (further) European integration, and the views of a growing number of groups in society who have lost their trust in this elite. They perceive the latter as technocratic Eurocrats who have lost touch with the realities in which most people in Europe live s and have become alienated from the ideals which motivated the founders of the European project.

The gap between citizens and the establishment is not a phenomenon confined to the EU and its institutions. It can also be found at the level of the individual Member States and even beyond Europe. In many EU Member States political groupings are emerging that question the legitimacy of the governing elite, both in their own country and, even more so, with regard to the European Union. The EU is losing its appeal. For sizeable groups of citizens, the EU is seen as a distant power that cannot be influenced and is driven by its own dynamics. Moreover, the EU is perceived as infringing on national sovereignty and undermining citizens' power. Politicians who have, in the course of time, blamed the EU for many problems that were not the EU's responsibility, have contributed to this alienation between the EU institutions and its citizens.

The process of growing alienation between EU citizens and EU institutions has been going on for a number of years. It is one of the reasons why the Lisbon Treaty (2007) gave a more prominent role to the European Parliament in EU decision making processes. It was hoped that this would enhance a sense of ownership by European voters of the EU. At the same time, the role of the European Council was significantly upgraded, giving heads of state and governments of individual Member States a greater say in EU affairs. These efforts recognise that collaboration at the Union level and subsidiarity are closely linked. The legitimate desire for subsidiarity must be reconciled with the need for collaboration among sovereign states. This will help cultivate a sense of ownership of the EU among its citizens. Collaboration at the EU level should be limited to issues and areas of work where cooperation is absolutely necessary for the promotion of the common good.

The changes resulting from the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, however, did not have the desired result of creating a greater sense of trust among EU citizens. In fact, the European Union, originally a visionary project, is facing increasing doubts and frustration. The perceived democratic deficit coupled with the economic difficulties, leads to a situation where more and more people question the legitimacy of the EU and its institutions.

VII. **EU losing its appeal?**
   "Where there is no vision, the people perish. (Proverbs 29:18)"

The current multitude of challenges facing the EU leads to a situation where the fundamental achievements and tenets of the Union are under threat. These include the single currency, open internal borders, access to welfare systems for EU citizens in the country where they live, and the EU as a peace project. The impression one gets is of an EU characterised by division, infighting, and the inability to frame effective responses to common problems. Rather than being perceived as part of the solution, the EU is seen by many as part of the problem. Never before in its history have tensions and divisions been

so severe. A full-scale collapse of the Union is still unlikely but a partial unravelling and marginalisation of the EU currently looks like a distinct possibility.

Looking at it from a distance, the multiplicity of crises becomes part of a broader picture. For example, if you create a monetary union without shared economic institutions, fiscal policies and legal systems, you are bound to hit the wall eventually. Likewise, a passport-free travel zone without a joint coastguard and border controls cannot last forever. The pattern emerges of an EU which has an innate tendency towards indecisive compromises and fair-weather constructions. Such an EU can unravel when pressures become too high.

The EU, with its complex systems of checks and balances, double-majority voting rules on some legislation and unanimity on others, was not constructed to deal with the emerging geopolitical and global economic crises. It was originally designed to deal with issues like negotiating trade agreements, implementing fair competition policy, conducting a Common Agricultural Policy, and disbursing structural funds. At present, the EU seems to be overwhelmed by the effects of global and regional military conflicts, the difficulties of effectively co-ordinating macroeconomic policy and addressing humanitarian emergencies within its own borders. Add to this recent terror attacks in Paris and Belgium, a (frozen) war in Ukraine, rows of people in front of soup kitchens in Athens, the body of a dead refugee child washed ashore on the Turkish coast, widespread anti-Islam and anti-immigrant sentiments, and large scale youth unemployment, and we see why the EU has lost its appeal to many of its citizens, and why the urge to re-nationalise policies and the call for more national sovereignty is gaining strength.

Today's Europe is characterised by a lack of vision and hope, and by growing fear. Fear of unemployment, decreasing future pension payments, climate change, terrorism, conflicts at the borders, migrants and refugees, loss of identity and loss of culture play an increasingly dominant role in daily thoughts. Many people see themselves as powerless and as victims of the processes over which they have no control. The present situation and prevailing mood presents a threat to the values on which the EU was built: peace, solidarity, unity in diversity, democracy, justice, the rule of law, human rights, freedom of religion and ecological sustainability. If the EU were to unravel, the common values on which it is based could be endangered as well. Therefore, it is not going too far to consider the present fundamental challenges to the European cooperation project as a Kairos moment—a crucial moment of truth—for the future of the Europe.

VIII.   EU at crossroads

Kairos moments and crises present dangers but also offer possibilities for choosing new ways forward. The present situation in the EU is serious but also offers an opportunity to re-imagine the Union. In this context, it is very important to listen carefully to the concerns and grievances that many people have about the EU. There is no future for the EU if no account is taken of the growing perception that developing common policies in the EU is hard to reconcile with the wish for national sovereignty. If people cannot be convinced that giving up some sovereignty can lead to more effective policies in confronting global issues, the EU will not survive. If people cannot be convinced that in

an increasingly globalising world even the big European states are too small to be able to influence developments regarding the economy, social, and ecological sustainability and effectively stand up for human rights and human dignity, the EU as we presently know it has no future. If it cannot be clearly demonstrated that, on the whole, people are better off, materially and immaterially, in a body like the EU, the Union will lose its *raison d'être*. If the EU does not manage to enhance transparency in its decision making processes, the Union will continue to be vulnerable to accusations of being undemocratic. If people in the EU do not feel consulted or empowered by common EU policies, the Union will continue to lack the necessary appeal for its citizens. If people do not feel enough ownership of the EU, they will ultimately disown the Union.

The present crises offer an opportunity to readjust European decision-making mechanisms. Not everything needs to be handled by 'Brussels' but what is decided there requires democratic legitimacy. What matters, both at European and national levels, is finding ways of listening to what people are actually saying. It seems clear that, irrespective of political point scoring, there is widespread public concern about the workings of the EU. People cannot understand how it works, voters do not feel consulted or empowered, and the results are therefore vulnerable to charges of being inadequate. Transparency and listening to citizens are of crucial importance for the future of the EU.

Another important issue is recognition of and respect for diversity. Throughout its history, there was never a homogenous (Christian) Europe, and the Europe of the future will also be pluralist. In the past, Islam has helped shape culture, especially in the Iberian Peninsula and parts of the Balkans, and during the past few decades waves of immigration have brought Islam and other religions to many parts of Europe. At the same time, we see a trend of growing secularisation, especially in the western and northern part of Europe. While parts of Europe have been moving towards greater unity, diversity remains a characteristic of the continent's identity. This diversity of cultures, traditions and religious identities must be respected, cultivated and even celebrated for the EU to have a future. The Union as a "super state" is, certainly in the foreseeable future, not feasible, if it would be desirable at all. However, a Europe characterised by, and based on multiple identities would be a good basis for developing joint policies towards common issues, and for a win-win situation for all those involved.

Within the EU there appears to be growing disenchantment with the way the EU has evolved in recent years, resulting in a revival of national and regional sentiment as a counterbalance. However, outside its current borders the appeal of a community of peace, relative prosperity, human rights, and rule of law is more popular than ever. There seems to be a popularity paradox: while the EU has lost its charm for its own citizens, those outside are literally dying to join. From the protesters in Maidan Square in Kiev in 2014 who died in a hail of bullets wearing EU twelve star armbands, to the many refugees taking to unseaworthy boats to cross the sea to reach our shores and taking a gamble that they or their close kin may only reach us in a shroud, and those camped out in cold and unsanitary conditions at the (for the moment temporarily) closed internal borders of Schengen. The level of devotion to, and desperation for reaching Europe or joining the EU is at an all-time high.

IX. A community of values and a soul searching project

Believe me; we will not succeed with Europe solely on the basis of legal expertise or economic ability. If we do not succeed in giving Europe a soul . . . give it a spirit and a meaning, then we failed.[6]

Jacques Delors

In 1990, the then president of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, felt that Europe needed a soul. Since then, churches on the continent have reflected on what this might mean and how they could contribute to this quest. Some 25 years later, the statement of Jacques Delors is very relevant again. Europe, and especially the EU, is faced with a number of interacting crises which pose serious challenges to the Union as a "community of values." Together, the values on which the EU is built—peace, solidarity, equality, unity in diversity, democracy, justice, the rule of law, human rights, freedom and ecological sustainability—could be seen as parts of a European soul. The Lisbon Treaty, signed in 2007, also clearly states that the European Union is based on shared values. Member Churches of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) have always seen it as part of their task to promote values like those mentioned above in the public space, both at the European and national levels.

Whereas CEC acknowledges that much can and should be done to improve the functioning of the European Union, we do not consider this a reason to disavow joint European cooperation, coordination and policy making as such. We are also convinced that the solution to the problems of the EU is not to draw up our bridges and hide behind our national borders. Europe tried that in the past, with disastrous consequences. Rather, the way forward is to search for ways to make the EU function better on the basis of the common values mentioned above. A community is not only based on laws and on rules but is also undergirded by values. In the case of the European Union these values are not exclusively Christian but they are deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The emphasis on values was one of the reasons why CEC and a number of individual churches in Europe appreciated the Lisbon Treaty. Shared vision, objectives and values that go beyond the sphere of economics are of substantial importance. A search for common European values is indeed the road leading to goals that cannot be reached merely by economic growth, increased competition and institutional reforms. Jointly owned values can bring enthusiasm, trust, spirit, and vision to the European project. At the same time they can bring the Union closer to its citizens while also promoting a sense of identity.

Another way to bring the Union closer to its citizens is through vigorous application of the concept of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity—to make decisions at levels as closely as possible to citizens—is not the opposite of solidarity. On the contrary: subsidiarity relies on the idea that every institutional level within the Union should do what it does best and on the basis of solidarity. Only such an approach could enhance

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6. European Integration - A way forward? Churches in Europe contributing to Europe's future: framework and issues, CSC of the Conference of European Churches, Brussels, 2009, 49.

accountability and legitimacy; two concepts that, according to many people, are short in supply in the EU today.

X.   **The role of churches and of CEC in Europe**
"The intrinsic value of each individual human being is of
fundamental importance for the churches."

In discussing which values should underpin society at large in Europe, churches should apply a certain degree of modesty, being mindful of the ambiguous role religion has played in Europe during the past 2000 years. This role cannot be discussed in any detail here but some keywords to keep in mind are: crusades, wars over and between religions, inquisition, patriarchal structures, persecutions of witches, colonisation, slave trade and slavery, racism and fascism.

At the same time, it should not be forgotten that churches, in the course of history, have also played a positive role in European society, for example through their pastoral and diaconal work, setting up and running healthcare systems, hospitals, schools and universities. At times, churches and Christians have also played a prophetic role, such as in the case of issuing the Barmen Confession in 1934 against the Nazi regime and its attempt to implement the *Führerprinzip* (leader principle) in the protestant church in Germany. Churches have also often been in the forefront of the fight against racism and militarism, in caring for refugees and asylum seekers, the struggle against poverty and exclusion and more recently, in the quest for ecological sustainability. The intrinsic value of each individual human being is of fundamental importance for the churches. This reflects the understanding of the human being as made in the image of God and as a counterpart to God (Genesis 1:27).

From their own experience, churches recognise the tensions and conflicts that can accompany diversity. In their best moments, churches have overcome such conflicts because the sense of belonging was stronger than striving for disunity. In those instances, they put more emphasis on what unites than on what separates the churches. It is on the basis of this experience and conviction that churches united in the Conference of European Churches dare to address issues related to unity in diversity on the continent of Europe. At the same time we are aware that Europe builds its identity in relation with other parts of the world. In this view, cooperation of churches with the World Council of Churches and developing of relations with regional ecumenical organisations in other parts of the world is of immense importance.

XI.   **Faith in action: Diaconia and koinonia**

In a period where European values like solidarity and human rights are under threat, it is important that churches in Europe show, through their actions, how such values can be put into practice. Statements on issues like future of Europe are only credible if churches themselves try to live up to the values they promote.

From the very beginning of the Church, Christians have pursued their social agenda through diaconia (Eph 6,7; Cor 16, 12-18; Phil 2,30). [7] It is a fundamental attribute of the Church and a guiding motive for its mission. Diaconia is based on communication and participation, directed toward wider society, and toward the fundamental economic, political and cultural structures that shape life.

> *An important function of diaconia is working both with, and on behalf of, those whom it seeks to serve. This role encompasses identifying and challenging injustices at every level—locally, nationally and internationally. It means addressing the huge disparities of income and wealth which mark the globalised economy. But it also means advocating the cause of those who are excluded because of race, gender, faith, ability   or age. It points to the need for all to change in order that all may live in dignity. Diaconia also has a ministry and a duty to address all injustices covering the vast territory from unjust use of force to injustices against nature and God's Creation. Such activity goes back to the foundational values of modern culture and rests on our fundamental belief in the equality of people before God, and of people as made in the image of God."* [8]

In church history, Christian diaconia (service) has always been understood as a contribution to the creation of a fellowship (koinonia) of solidarity, in the sense of a koinonia of persons (1 John 1,7). It is an expression of the fullness of the body of Christ. From a theological perspective, diaconia is inseparably related to koinonia. A local church can only fully realise itself when it is a serving, diaconal church. As the prominent 20th century theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) pointed out: "*The Church is only the Church when it is there for other people.*"

The need for a common witness in civil society has been echoed on several occasions by the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), Heinrich Bedford-Strohm. He stresses that "*public theology and public witness, need to get much attention in our work.*"[9] This view is echoed and focussed on Europe by Archbishop Michael, former metropolitan of Austria, who stated that, in critical times, churches are more than ever called to "*project their values in a broad society and exhort the responsible politicians to respect the human person created in the image and likeness of God. In order to do so, the churches should demonstrate an ecumenical responsibility, a common Christian testimony and a cross-confessional witness within Europe.*"[10]

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7. Origin of the word is in Greek and means 'service.'
8. European integration – A way forward?, Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches. Brussels, 2009.
9. For example see his speech at the CEC consultation on the Pilgrimage for Climate Justice held at the Evangelical Academy Villigst in Schwerte (Germany), 15 October 2015.

10. Archbishop Michael (1946-2011) former Metropolitan of Austria quoted in: European integration – A way forward?, Church and Society Commission of Conference of European Churches, Brussels, 2009

XII.   **Europe: A common home**

European identity has always presented paradoxical traits. On the one hand, the history of our continent has demonstrated a shared sense of belonging; on the other, it is equally evident that for many centuries the shared patrimony has always manifested itself in quite a plurality of forms, cultures, and languages.

CEC Member Churches come from diverse cultures and traditions. We know from experience that it can be difficult to deal with differences. At the same time, however, we know that we should not be afraid of differences and that 'unity in diversity' can be a successful formula if we focus on common concerns, respect and even treasure different identities by providing space for diversity and focusing on that which unites us.

CEC observes with concern that in the Europe of today common values are less in evidence. The EU today is at a stage in its history where serious questions can be asked about its identity as a community of values. Soul searching is required anew and with renewed intensity. Europe needs more than a common market. It has to include the question of identity and social relationships. The neglect of their importance over the past years led to Europe's current empty heart, driven by economic competitiveness and profit, equipping students and young professionals with high profile science degrees, but forgetting about a bigger goal than success and profit. The EU and Europe as a whole need once again a clear explanation about what its roots and goals are. The desire for more sovereignty can be understood but, in the view of CEC, sovereignty should not mean selfishness and closing one's eye for the legitimate needs of other people who are need of solidarity. Over and above sovereignty, CEC prefers koinonia to be the leading concept in the debate about the future of Europe. Koinonia focuses on how genuine communities, which are based on sharing, service and solidarity, can be created.

Even in communities based on the concept of koinonia, conflicts and difference of interests can be part of daily life. If the spirit of koinonia prevails, such conflicting interests can be fruitful because they are handled in a responsible way. Cultural and political diversity in Europe should not necessarily be seen as a threat to its unity but as a potential treasure and enrichment. The creation of a common Europe must not be based on an expansion of one particular lifestyle nor on imposing standards of one part of the continent on another." *The process of developing a common Europe is certainly a process of developing a sense of European community . . . The true value of 'community' should be once again given importance in the European context. A natural feature of the 'community' is life in solidarity.*"[11] "*The biblical notion of multiple identities as it is introduced in Paul's letter to the Romans is something that can be further developed especially in the conditions on our continent.*"[12] Fruitful European cooperation can only succeed if it is based on dialogue, mutual understanding, respect for each other's history and culture, and learning from each other. "*The EU and, indeed, Europe as a whole, need to be clearly recognisable as a community of values; it must sharpen its social profile and give young people better*

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11.   CEC/CSC: Churches in the Process of European Integration, Brussels, May 2001 (14)
12.   *Ibid.*, 15.

prospects for their future. Europe needs to be a continent of reconciled diversity which confronts its worldwide responsibility."[13]

For CEC, the choice for the future of the EU is not between a full blown federalist system on the one hand, and a patchwork of independent states hiding behind their draw bridges on the other hand. Each issue and policy has to be judged on its own merit in order to assess where 'more Europe' or 'less Europe' is necessary. The main criterion for making such an assessment is the question which policy is most effective for enhancing the quality of life in Europe and in the world as a whole. In this broader view, an EU operating at different speeds is feasible. An EU *à la carte* with members continually opting in and out of joint policies is not desirable and would be unworkable. It is possible, however, that a core group of Member States decides to pursue further integration of policies while others prefer not to go along. For example, in our view not all Member States have to agree on detailed political issues such as joint monetary policies. It is, nevertheless, crucial that policy decisions are based on fundamental values that unite countries in the EU. Such values should not only apply to the EU but should extend to Europe as a whole.

To address the current pressing problems in Europe and to respond to all the practical challenges, we need vision and commitment, and the cooperation of all available forces; public and private sector, politicians and civil society, and also churches and others motivated by faith and conviction. Cooperation and dialogue are essential principles in this respect. In order for our dialogue to become more than a mere cultural exchange, politicians of the European Union, as well as the wider public were reminded by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew during his visit to the European Parliament that"*there must be a more profound understanding of the absolute interdependence—not merely of states and political and economic actors – but the interdependence of every single human person with every other single human person.*"[14]

For CEC it is crucial to strive for peace with justice in Europe, as citizens and as churches. We can achieve this only when we join forces. The process of joint policy making based on shared fundamental values, which has been promoted by many churches and their members must continue to serve its purpose—the fruitful management of relations between interdependent nations to the benefit of the common good in Europe and in the world. The churches in Europe, with their broad-based membership and ecumenical structures, are in a good position to encourage people to strive for a common European house with commonly shared values as its foundation.

In 1989 at the first European Ecumenical Assembly in Basel, the concept of a "common European home" played an important role. The Basel Assembly set up something like "house rules" for the European home:

- the principle of the equality of all who live there, whether strong or weak;

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13. Statement of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) on the situation of Europe, 23 April 2016.
14. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, European Parliament, Brussels, 24 September 2008

- recognition of such values as freedom, justice, tolerance, solidarity, participation;
- a positive attitude towards adherents of different religions, cultures and world views;
- dialogue instead of resolving conflicts through violence.

CEC believes that these words are still very relevant for the situation in which Europe finds itself today. They continue to inspire us, both as a vision and as an urgent agenda for the citizens and the politicians on our continent.

Europe needs both vision, as well as clear acknowledgment of our roots. The Union needs to provide for people living there a home offering the place, as well as the space. In this regard it may be helpful to make a distinction, proposed by the former President of the EU Council Herman van Rompuy:

> *A place—'ein Ort'—brings protection, stability and belonging. It is 'ein Heim', where people feel at home. A space on the other hand 'ein Raum,' opens up movement and possibilities. It is about direction, speed and time. As human beings, we need both. A space in which we fly, and a nest we can call ours. We are very simple creatures! With Europe, the focus has always been on space.*[15]

The European Union cannot survive as a beacon of hope if the law of the market is the only guiding principle. We have to recapture the spirit that inspired the founding fathers – including reconciliation, forgiveness, solidarity, human dignity with equal respect for all. The multiple crises that Europe is currently facing are not as great as those suffered after the end of the Second World War, and yet competing interests seem to be paralysing an effective common response. A society that is not a community will fall apart. We call upon all people of goodwill, whatever their creed or conviction to join in the struggle to overcome petty differences and be willing to put the best interests of the continent as a whole—both its longstanding citizens and those arriving as new residents—before sectional interest and afford to all the dignity merited by fellow human beings, creatures made in the image and likeness of God.

XIII. **Our call**

In evaluating the current challenges people in Europe have to face, in the spirit of the Charta Oecumenica and responding to the call to a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace of the World Council of Churches, the governing board of CEC:

- Issues this open letter to churches in Europe on the situation in the continent, which outlines its vision of Europe with regard to the EU and shares its concerns about the future of this historical European project in the present circumstances;

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15. Herman van Rompuy in his speech on 4 December 2014 at the occasion of launching the new headquarter of CEC in Brussels

- Reaffirms its understanding of the EU as a community of values pursuing human dignity, peace, reconciliation, justice, the rule of law, democracy, the respect for human rights, solidarity and sustainability;

- Encourages CEC Member Churches and all Christians in Europe to step up efforts in making such Christian virtues as respect for others, solidarity, diaconia and building up a community more visible in public life;

- Calls churches in Europe to an intensive discussion on the future of our continent, the role of the European Union and our vision of shared values.

Invites CEC Member Churches and partner organisations to react to this letter; considering the specific situation in different parts of the continent, we invite churches to be part of a consultative and participatory process leading to the next CEC Assembly in 2018. We appreciate receiving your contributions highlighting your specific experiences and concerns related to the European project. We also appreciate reflection on the role of the churches in this historical moment, and in shaping the vision of a European home, as well as questions arising from these discussions. Churches may also wish to articulate their expectations of CEC in this regard by the end of December 2016.

ANNEX: Fundamental values of the European Union

Article 2
The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

Article 3
1. The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples.
2. The Union shall offer its citizens an area of freedom, security and justice without internal frontiers, in which the free movement of persons is ensured in conjunction with appropriate measures with respect to external border controls, asylum, immigration and the prevention and combating of crime.
3. The Union shall . . . combat social exclusion and discrimination, and shall promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child. It shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States. It shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced.
5. In its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests and contribute to the protection of its citizens. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter.
Treaty on European Union