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# In Community for Europe



Contribution of the Hungarian Churches  
to the Hungarian EU Presidency





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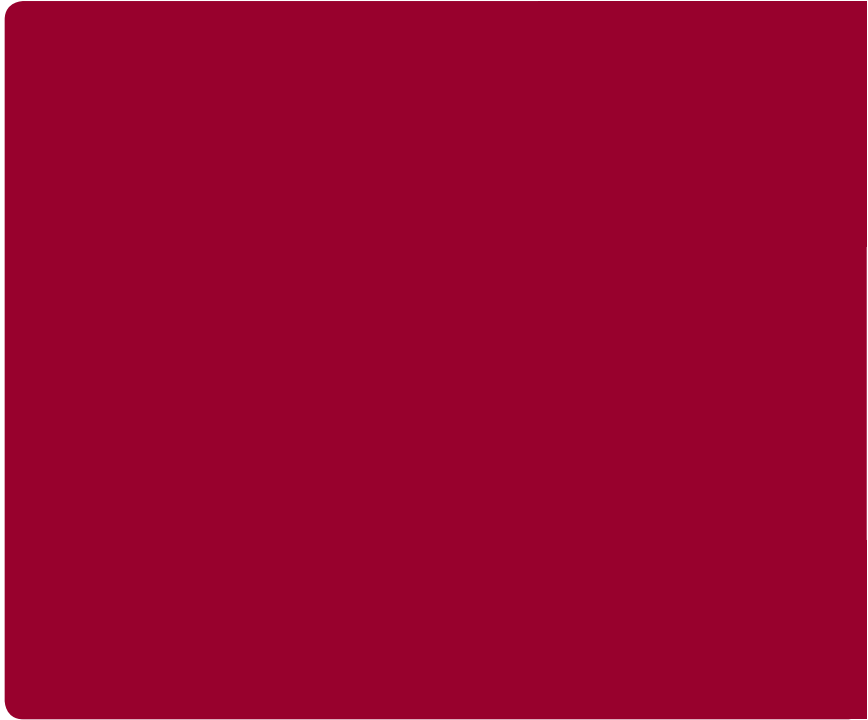
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# *Greeting Addresses*





# Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary

*Dr. Zoltán Bóna*

General Secretary

The Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary has been a platform of co-operation for Christ's followers for nearly seven decades, where there is room for common prayer, witness, service and joy in our fellowship.

Let us greet the Hungarian Presidency of the European Union in the spirit of the joy of serving in Christ. Strengthened by the certainty of the hope in the Gospel, we pray for the success of this grand continental task, may it bring blessings and peace for all. We are ready to make our own contributions to this service with the devotion of love rooted in the Gospel.

Our joyous, hopeful and loving greetings are underlined by our belief that the same Christian ethos can be recognised in the creation and development of Europe that has been of pivotal importance in the thousand-year-old history of Hungary.

Our country and our nation has contributed to serving peace, safety and welfare of Europe in manifold ways over the past thousand years. May the next six months be a continuation of that service with the help of God.

# Reformed Church in Hungary



The words of King Stephen in the Hungarian rock opera *István, a Király* are appropriate in reference to the European Union, too: “You’re so far away, but still close.” For the outsider, the network of the European Institutions seems to be a complicated, Kafkaesque system in which competing bodies, institutions and communities lobby for their own interests – only comprehensible to those who are actively involved in it. However, the European community is much more than that, having an ever-growing influence on our everyday lives. It is closer to us than we think. The EU’s community of values is based on the Christian vision of its founders about peace and prosperity through justice, and about a continent that has a mission in our world.



*Dr. Gusztáv Bölcskei*

Presiding Bishop

In this double reality of Europe, the EU Presidency is a great opportunity for Hungary to start new dossiers to complement the ones inherited, and, with the original vision in perspective, to bring the Union closer to the people by recognising the community aspects. As a global network of local communities committed to a unity in reconciled diversity, the churches wish to become partners in every good initiative that aims to achieve this.

Therefore the Reformed Church in Hungary has been engaging in an active dialogue with international church partners, the representatives of EU institutions and the Hungarian government to contribute with its own particular approach to the assertion of Christian values defining Europe during the Hungarian EU Presidency, and later on, too.

We welcome the opportunity through which the Christian churches of Hungary will be able to contribute to the visibility of the EU Presidency priorities as well as to a successful Hungarian EU Presidency.

*Péter Gáncs*  
Presiding Bishop

# Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Hungary



The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Hungary is the community not only of Hungarian but also German and Slovak congregations, and worships are conducted in three languages nowadays. Over our five-hundred-year history, we have learnt that different languages and cultures can become sources of mutual enrichment. The preservation and cultivation of these are precious heritage and common responsibility of ours.

Our congregations experience various forms of minority and diaspora, so we are well aware of both the difficulties and the blessings of this way of life. According to our mission based on Christ's teachings, we strive to benefit the greater communities as salt and yeast.

We are excited to be able to share our unique experience – regarding living productively for one another, in peaceful co-existence – with the diverse, multilingual and multicultural family of the European Union. Hungary's six-month EU Presidency provides an especially great opportunity to do so. With the help of God and the modest powers we have, we will strive to use this opportunity well.

A mighty fortress is our God!

# Baptist Union of Hungary

*Dr. Kálmán Mészáros*

Head of the Baptist Union  
of Hungary

On behalf of the Fellowship and national leadership of the Baptist Union of Hungary, we wish for the Hungarian politicians enjoying the public's trust to feel God's protecting grace and wisdom over the next half year, during the EU Presidency. We are honoured that such a significant task has been bestowed upon the current government of Hungary concerning the governance of our continent of nearly five hundred million people. Not only is this a great opportunity, but also a huge responsibility.

We feel that if the Lord of History decided to put power in human hands, He also provided the gift of governing. He gave humanity His laws for the protection of the world that was created to be beautiful and good, and for the restraining of evil forces. We are convinced that

this noble task and mission cannot be fulfilled without the help of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That is why we ask the leaders of our country to keep that in mind when making decisions regarding the governing of our continent.

May our leaders' work serve God's glory and benefit the peoples of Europe. We are ready to pray for this aim, spread the message of the Gospel with increased determination, and further strengthen our efforts in charity services in the future.

*István Csernák*  
Superintendent

# United Methodist Church in Hungary



I think with joy of the upcoming half year, and of the tasks and opportunities the Hungarian EU Presidency will bring. A huge opportunity has been offered to our small country to become better-known, and to be noticed. On the other hand, we have an increased responsibility in sharing the values that we possess with the peoples of Europe. We also get the chance to listen to and seriously consider the observations by European guests.

We can become envoys of peace during this period, contributing to the building of the bridge that would connect east and west, poor and rich, and provide such “bridge-building” activities for those who are in need of our solidarity. We can become a good example in our efforts and programmes to achieve the

advancement of the Roma community. We as Hungarian Methodists and members of an international church community of 75 million Methodists worldwide, welcome this opportunity since we have brothers and sisters in faith in several European countries, with whom we belong to the same community, through organisational ties and conferences.

We would like to share the news of the positive changes in our country with our international church. We also see great opportunities for the facilitation of European and Hungarian ecumenical relations. May God’s blessing be upon the life of our nation, the responsible work of our state leaders and their colleagues, may He provide us with new visions, new ways, renewed families and lives as a result of this period.

# Serbian Orthodox Church in Hungary

*Gáality Vojisláv*

Episcopal Vicar

The Serbian Orthodox Church in Hungary welcomes that during the next half year the European Union will operate under Hungarian Presidency. We hope that the Presidency of a country such as Hungary, which has a Christian heritage and culture, can contribute considerably to the strengthening of Christian values within the Union. We are aware that it is essential for churches to renew their witness and take a stand for Christian values in order for these values to regain their original meaning in the hearts of modern people both within the EU and across the globe. To achieve

that aim, faith itself needs to be renewed, our faith in Christ, which – as so often throughout history – has to be the firm foundation of the community’s structure if Europe wants to build a real future, not a house of cards, for humanity, for the whole created world. A future that provides a place for all the goodness, love and beauty of past and present times. A future that our Creator Himself imagined for the world when He created it.

+ *Michael*

Metropolitan of Austria  
Exarch of Hungary  
and Central Europe  
Ecumenical Patriarchate  
of Constantinople

# Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople Hungarian Orthodox Exarchate



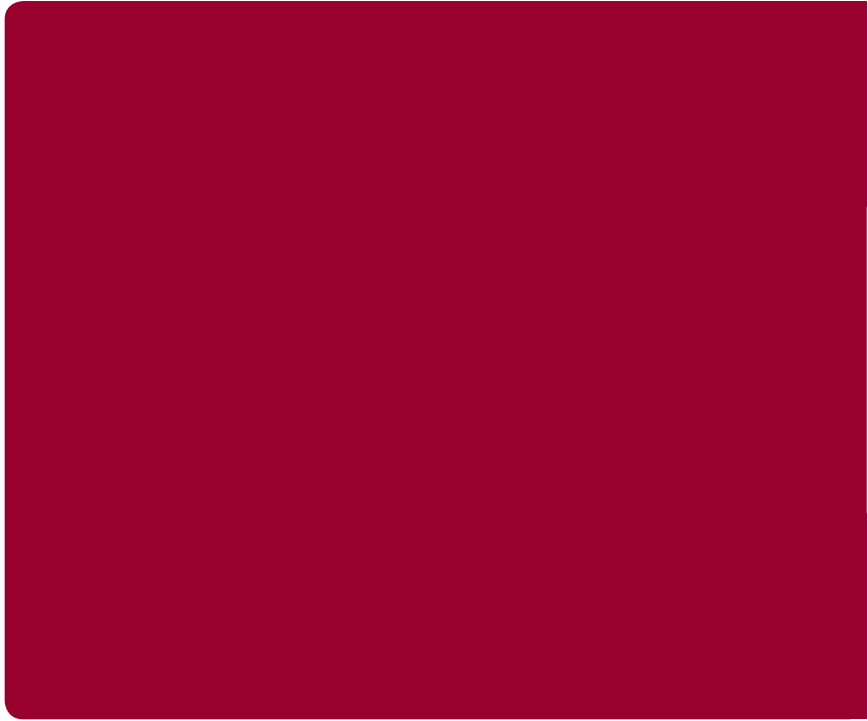
At the beginning of the year 2011, with faith in God's benevolent help and great mercy, let me greet the Hungarian nation and the government that has just assumed the EU Presidency.

In spite of today's growing economic and moral crisis, I wish all the success both for Hungary and Europe. I hope, from the bottom of my heart, that everyone of faith and all our brothers and sisters of goodwill will see their lives change for the better. That is why we continue to rely on our loving God, who encourages His insecure and desperate disciples: "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid" (Mt 14:27).

May He be for us, my dear fellows in Hungary, "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (Heb 6:19), the assurance of peace and welfare as individuals, families and as a society, as well as a patron, supporter and Saviour.

With my Episcopal blessings and prayers in God.







# Who Are We?



# Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary

The Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary was formed in 1943 on the initiative of the Reformed Bishop László Ravasz and Lutheran National Supervisor Albert Radvánszky. The horrors of the Second World War as well as international ecumenical developments meant that the time had arrived for such an organisation to be born. The organisation was greatly influential both during and after the war with its theological, spiritual and social services.

The Council currently consists of ten Protestant and Orthodox member churches (*Anglican Church in Hungary, Baptist Union of Hungary, Bulgarian Orthodox Church in Hungary, Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (Hungarian Orthodox Exarchate), Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Hungary, Hungarian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), Reformed Church in Hungary, Romanian Orthodox Church in Hungary, Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Buda, United Methodist Church in Hungary*). Moreover, it provides a platform of co-operation for twenty-eight churches – among others, the Hungarian Catholic Church – and church-affiliated organizations.

The formation of the Council, just like the various steps towards European integration, was motivated by a desire to achieve peace and justice both on a national and an international level. In connection with the latter, the organisation has taken an active part in the work of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), and through that in a kind of *détente* facilitated by the Helsinki process, and since the 1990s the organisation has participated in promoting the European integration, through the Church and Society Commission of CEC.

The Social-Ethical Committee of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary constantly keeps the question of European integration on its agenda. The Committee has been drafting several thematic reflections and made sure to inform the Member Churches about these issues. This activity will predominate in the work of the above-mentioned Committee over the next six months.

# Reformed Church in Hungary

In the 16th century, parallel with the European Reformation, the Swiss Reformation, especially Calvin's teachings spread rapidly throughout the Carpathian Basin. The existence of the Hungarian Reformed Church is dated from the Synod of Debrecen in 1567, when the Heidelberg Catechism and the Second Helvetic Confession were adopted. Nevertheless, in legal terms the Hungarian Reformed Community couldn't give shape to its unity before 1881, the date of the first General Synod. As a result of the Treaty of Trianon, following the First World War, a significant part of the Reformed Church of Hungary's members found themselves outside Hungary's new borders. Globally there are approx. 2.5 millions of Hungarian Reformed people registered. Of these, approximately one and a half million live in Hungary, and nearly a million in various neighbouring countries. The Hungarian Reformed community in the Carpathian Basin had the chance to give public witness to the fact that: "Christ is the future, we'll join hands and follow Him," by signing the Constitution of the Hungarian Reformed Church on 22 May 2009.

The Reformation – through the translation of the Bible and the Genevan psalms into Hungarian, the introduction of the printing press in the 1530s and the expanding school network – had a lasting impression not only on Hungarian literature and language, but also on the development of Hungarian thinking in general. For centuries, the famous colleges (in Debrecen, Sárospatak, Pápa, Kecskemét, Nagyvárad, Nagyenyed, Kolozsvár and Marosvásárhely) were fortresses of Hungarian Reformed culture and education, cultivating the talents of numerous would-be poets, scientists and politicians. The Reformed Church in Hungary comprises 1196 congregations in 27 presbyteries. The presbyteries form four church districts: Danubian, Transdanubian, Cistibiscan, Transtibiscan Church Districts. The main legislative and executive body of the Reformed Church in Hungary is the Synod, which is elected every six years and consists of a hundred members. Presently, the Reformed Church of Hungary operates a hospital, 257 diaconal services, 122 institutions of education and 11 conference centres. The training of Reformed ministers takes place in four institutions (Debrecen, Budapest, Sárospatak, Pápa).

# Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Hungary

Our church is the community united in Jesus Christ, consisting of nearly three hundred Lutheran congregations. The members, despite all their differences, form “one body,” whether they belong to a tiny diaspora congregation or a ten thousand-strong one.

There are three bishops co-ordinating the work of the congregations so that the Gospel can reach even those areas where only a single Lutheran lives in a village, while still present in places where our members are in majority. The seats of the three church districts (in Buda, Győr and Pest) are at the same time spiritual centres for all Lutherans.

The administrative centre of our church – located at 24 Üllői St., Budapest – provides services to facilitate the work of our congregations and church institutions. Apart from the Education, Economic, Construction, Legal and Youth Departments (which are all available for Lutherans), this centre is open for everyone who is in need of help from the services of mission in hospitals, prisons or other aspects of mission work, as well as the University Chaplaincy.

In our thirty-seven institutions of education (kindergartens and schools), there are about seven thousand students being prepared for life by nearly a thousand teachers. There are over a hundred students studying at the Evangelical-Lutheran Theological University to become pastors or teachers of religion.

In our diaconal institutions, hundreds of elderly people are provided with a home and community for the last period of their lives. We also provide services for disabled children. The homeless shelter in Nyíregyháza, the centre for the rehabilitation of alcoholics in Györköny, the social care centre in Piliscsaba, and the home care services in Kiskőrös and Szarvas all prove the social sensitivity of Lutherans.

Our holiday resorts – in Balatonszárszó, Gyenesdiás, Sopron, for example – provide the recuperation of body and soul, and our conference centres – such as the ones in Révfülöp and Piliscsaba – offer the opportunity of spiritual refreshment for those in search of the more profound meanings of life.

# Baptist Union of Hungary

Within the two-thousand-year-old history of Christianity, it was during the period of the Reformation that a Gospel awakening movement started, following Biblical doctrines, and we consider ourselves to be the modern descendants of this movement. The first missionaries professing Baptist principles arrived in Hungary from Switzerland in 1525, many of whom suffered martyrdom on account of their faith.

What differentiates Baptists from other Protestants is the fact that they reject infant baptism, which lacks the element of faith, instead, returning to the original Biblical practice, they baptise by way of full immersion those adults who confess their faith, following the example and instruction of Jesus. This is where their name comes from, because in the New Testament's Greek language the word *Baptist* refers to the practice of immersion.

Globally, Baptists have outnumbered the followers of any other Protestant denominations. The biggest number of Baptists live in the Americas. There are nearly 110 million Baptists – including their family members – around the world. In Hungary, after the terrible persecution and exile following the Reformation, the modern Baptist mission was revived in 1846 in a more organised form. Within the present borders of Hungary there are approximately 30-40 thousand people involved in the Baptist church, including family members and supporters. There are an estimated 250 thousand Baptist believers of Hungarian or other nationality in the Carpathian Basin.

# United Methodist Church in Hungary

The bishop-organised branch of the Methodist movement of the 18th century has been present in Hungary since 1898. The Methodist church is a free church based on the Reformation. Apart from the Anglican teaching, its formation was primarily defined by Luther's, Calvin's and the Herrnhutian influence.

It has been serving as a part of the international United Methodist Church from the outset, and also as an active member of European Methodism. The Central and Southern Europe Episcopal Area consists of thirteen European nations, eight of which are members of the European Union.

Our church has always been characterised by an ecumenical way of thinking that takes into consideration both Hungarian and international conditions. Apart from being a member of a Hungarian ecumenical community (ECCH), we also belong to the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). Our Methodist representatives actively participate in these organisations.

The operations of the church have always reflected a responsible attitude towards the social problems of our nation, and its aims are in many ways harmonious with those of the Hungarian EU Presidency. We consider social issues and the advancement of the Roma community to be of great importance. We run two homes for the elderly and are involved in work with neglected youth, alcoholics and prisoners. Our Roma congregations are active in supportive and community services for our Roma sisters and brothers. Through the church, we have participated in the network of Danubian nations for a long time, maintaining virtually daily contact with the Austrian, Slovak, Serbian and Bulgarian member churches.

# Serbian Orthodox Church

The Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Buda belongs to the Serbian Patriarchate. Although its formation dates back to the first half of the 17th century, we had had congregations in Hungary operating in an organised form already in the 15th century. Our monastery-church in Ráckeve (1487) is a unique memento of the first greater settlements in Hungary.

During the Great Migration (1690) led by Patriarch Arsenije Čarnojević, nearly twenty thousand Serbian Orthodox families settled down in Hungary, fleeing Turkish revenge. Of our forty churches still standing, most were built in the 18th century. The episcopal seat of our diocese is Szentendre, where in a period of twenty years, seven churches have been erected by the Serbian community.

Our monastery in Grábóc (Tolna county), which was founded in the 16th century, is a masterpiece of Orthodox church art.

After centuries of being the centre of Serbian religion and national identity in Hungary, between the Second World War and the political changes of 1989, the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Buda lost its network of schools, the support of the foundations – as these were forced to close down –, as well as most of its possessions.

Since the political changes, we have again been involved in education. The famous Thökölyanum Student Hostel, founded in 1838 and closed down after the Second World War, is soon to be reopened.

The Serbian Orthodox Church Museum is the biggest of its kind in Central Europe, and is the third most popular museum in Szentendre.

Under the direction of the current Bishop of our diocese, Bishop Pantelic Lukijan, there are 14 priests and 3 deacons serving the community.

The main activity of our small diocese is to disseminate knowledge but also to serve missionary purposes, also by the operation of the publishing house Odigitria, the aim of which is to provide information about Orthodox theology and spirituality through publishing representative Orthodox works of art in Hungarian translation.

# Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople Orthodox Exarchate in Hungary

The spiritual relationship between the Church of Constantinople and Hungary dates back to the 10th century. Throughout the Middle Ages, Byzantine priests and monks could live peacefully in the country, and there were flourishing Orthodox monasteries as well (in Veszprém, Marosvár, Visegrád, Pásztó, Dunapetele and Szávaszentdemeter).

The active nature of Hungarian-Byzantine relations is amply represented by dynastic marriages; Piroska, daughter of Hungarian king Saint Ladislau, for example, became a Byzantine empress; she was later canonised as Saint Irene Prisca by the Greek Orthodox Church.

Following the Mongol invasion and Turkish rule, Orthodoxy began to regain its strength through the settlement of different nations in Hungary. Orthodox people of Greek or other nationality built churches and schools to retain ties with their church as well as their new home.

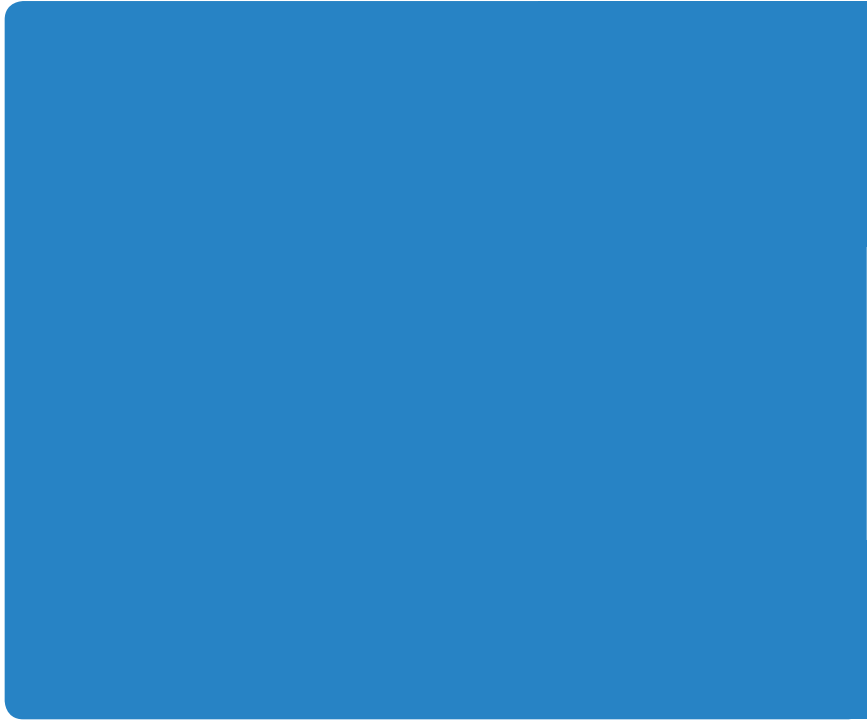
After the Treaty of Trianon, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople established the Saint Metropoly in Hungary on 15 April 1924 to provide spiritual care of Greek congregations in the country. The legal successor of the metropoly is the Orthodox Exarchate in Hungary.

Thus the Patriarchate has been present in the life of the Hungarian state and Hungarian Christianity for over a thousand years. However, it has only been operating as an Exarchate since 1990, when democracy and freedom of religion were restored.

We have churches in Beloiannisz, Szentes, Karcag and Kecskemét. In Budapest there is an office and a chapel. There are an estimated thousand adherents. Our leader is Michail Staikos, Metropolitan of Austria, Exarch of Hungary and Central Europe.







# *Churches' Expectations in Relation to the Hungarian EU Presidency*



The first half of 2011, when the EU is under Hungarian Presidency, provides great opportunities not only for government bodies but also for the Christian churches of Hungary. The member churches of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary, therefore, would like to take an active part in the events of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in co-operation with international church organisations, partner churches with experience in the field, civil-society initiatives and government officials.

According to government priorities, the political agenda of the Hungarian EU Presidency is to be built around the human factor. The churches – with their realistic view of humanity, placid view of the world as well as their attitude of critical solidarity towards political and economic institutions – can be useful partners in bringing about a more humane Europe.\* While engaging in dialogues and constructive co-operation, our churches will remain true to their prophetic mission and strive to set Christian values as good examples. They will try to reach further segments of society not only through preaching the Gospel and by means of diaconal service, but also through their presence in public life.

Europe is first and foremost a community of values, not a mere alliance of interests. The founders, on the basis of their Christian faith, have resolved to end the division of the Continent in the name of reconciliation and social equity. That fundamental aim is still relevant today.

In order to make progress in that respect, we consider the following principles to be indispensable in community policies:

## *RESPONSIBLE PARTICIPATION*

The European Union should not be about directives but about people. It is obvious from the recent economic and political crisis as well as the increase in social tensions and radicalism – that have been the direct results of the crisis – that the future of Europe depends on its citizens' responsible participation in the life of the continent. We would like to live in a *Europe that is close to the people* and enables them to realise the joy of European unity, while preserving their cultural and intellectual independence, and to exploit the opportunities provided by the EU. We expect that during the Hungarian EU Presidency, with the help and involvement of social and civil partners, further steps will be taken along the lines of the principles laid down in the Lisbon Treaty to achieve a *more efficient and human-oriented European system of institutions*.

## *SOLIDARITY*

The idea of *solidarity* should become more than an empty slogan and gain ground in economic and political decisions. This principle of the EU needs to be expressed towards the multifarious Member States and social classes. We expect solidarity and responsibility to prevail – solidarity towards each other and responsibility towards the most vulnerable segments of society –, in the spirit of EU Treaties, in the economic and political decisions of the upcoming period, especially when it comes to drafting the reform ideas of the EU2020 strategy and the EU's budget after 2014.

*"The churches support an integration of the European continent. Without common values, unity cannot endure. We are convinced that the spiritual heritage of Christianity constitutes an empowering source of inspiration and enrichment for Europe. 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. We likewise insist on the reverence for life, the value of marriage and the family, the preferential option for the poor, the readiness to forgive, and in all things compassion."*

Charta Oecumenica, 7.

## SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Europe must not give up on its social responsibilities. Social equity must be present in times of economic crisis as well, even if other players of world economy are not committed to it, and short-time interests seem to dictate otherwise. We expect both the Member States' and EU institutions to realise that social security and tensions stemming from social inequalities cannot be handled exclusively on the level of the Member States, and competitiveness must not predominate over the interests of citizens, communities and disadvantaged or vulnerable groups.



*"As churches and as international communities we have to counteract the danger of Europe developing into an integrated West and a disintegrated East, and also take account of the North-South divide within Europe. At the same time we must avoid Eurocentricity and heighten Europe's sense of responsibility for the whole of humanity, particularly for the poor all over the world."*

Charta Oecumenica, 7.

## *INTERDEPENDENCE AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE*

In the spirit of partnership and solidarity, it is both an opportunity and responsibility for the Hungarian EU Presidency to represent the specific experience of integration and ideas of the Central-Eastern European region, and thus facilitating the dialogue about the still-existing disparities between the Eastern and Western parts of the continent. We expect the consecutive presidencies of two Central-Eastern European Member States, Hungary and Poland, to enhance the discovery and mutual understanding of interdependent European cultural communities that live together.



*“We recognize that unsustainable methods of wealth creation and the adherence to unlimited growth impoverish communities and harm creation as a whole. We have learned how challenges of injustice and climate change are interlinked. We have stressed that social and climate justice belong together.”*

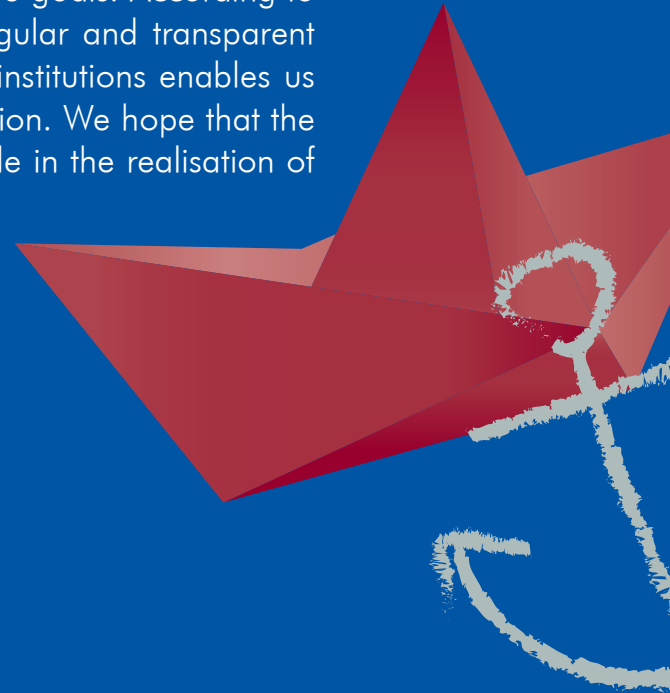
Final Statement of the Conference  
on Poverty and Wealth  
and Ecology in Europe,  
Budapest, November 2010.

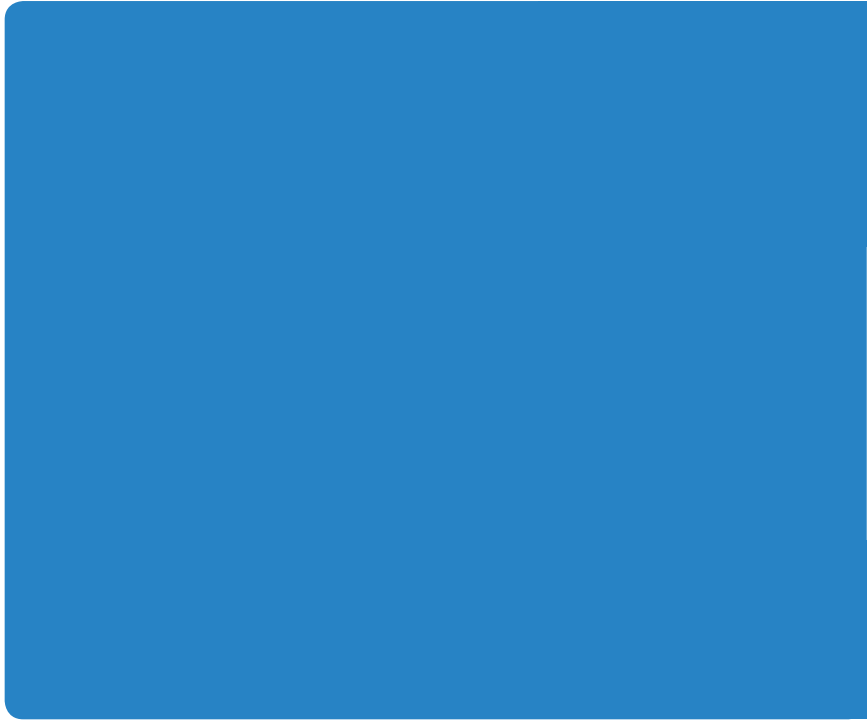
## *RESPONSIBILITY TO FUTURE GENERATIONS*

Europe is a community of communities both in terms of space and time. Thus, with view to future generations, the principles of solidarity, equity and justice need to prevail throughout the whole created world, in the fields of ecology and the protection of creation as well. We expect the European Union to take into consideration not only the economic and competitive aspects of ecological ideas, but their social and communal aspects as well. We would like to see the Union advocate the requirement of *responsibility to the future* more effectively, and hold the players of world economy accountable in this respect.



Our churches, with their centuries-old experience and an active Europe-wide network of relationships encompassing local communities, intend to become committed yet critical partners of national and European political institutions in achieving the above goals. According to Article 17 of the Treaty of Lisbon, the open, regular and transparent dialogue of religious communities and political institutions enables us to contribute to the process of European integration. We hope that the Hungarian EU Presidency will set a great example in the realisation of such a partnership.





# *Our Priorities During the Hungarian EU Presidency*



# Cultural diversity in Central and Eastern Europe



Central and Eastern Europe can be distinctly recognised on the map of Europe, its specific development within European history also can be clearly indicated, and the unique features of its social structures and cultural diversity can be analysed as well. However, the region can only be regarded as the special outcome of the spiritual and physical processes of Europe. Central and Eastern Europe is a kind of axis or, to put it in other words, a region of clashes. It was born within Europe's ever-changing force field of politics and power, swinging between East and West.

Europe has always desired great issues. The grand values of humanity came out of intellectual and political conflicts – stagnation, senility, living without aims have been never tolerated

for long. The European Union has to face the same situation now. What does Europe mean today for itself and for humanity in terms of culture, science, society and morality? What will tomorrow and the day after bring for us? What does being European require of us? What can we achieve as Europeans? Can we talk about “a matter of Europe,” or is life really elsewhere already?

We believe that in Central and Eastern Europe there is indeed a matter of Europe as it questions our identity as a region. As Christians, we think that the matter of Europe is the reconciliation of peoples and nations in this region. For centuries, the nations living here have been exposed to a mixture of similar values and religions. Their cultures are deeply in-

tertwined, and yet cultural diversity, which is a productive value in everyday life, has become a destructive force in politics. Despite the fact that we share the same historical experiences as all of us have been both victims and perpetrators of historical injustice, this common path hardly ever enhances reconciliation, but it heightens fear and mistrust instead.

However, we as Christians are aware of the teaching that fear turns us into enemies, but if the grace of Christ defeats the fear in us, we will become brothers and sisters. Reconcilia-

tion, that is, the victory over division, is a matter of Europe. Apart from being an economic and social framework, it is this way that the European Union can mean the key to freedom for Central and Eastern European people. Our countries can only become mature democracies if the historical fears passed on from generation to generation are finally dissolved. Similarly, in our national self-image we can only experience new and exciting horizons if we find a brotherhood of various nations through Christ.

# Families in Europe

As regards marriage and families, there is a huge gap between hopes and reality all over Europe. Most of us aim to have a harmonious and balanced family life, however, there have been various obstacles that have led to the destabilisation of the institution of marriage and the disintegration of families. In order to strengthen social cohesion, both personal and institutional conditions need to improve, and there has to be a family-friendly policy on the level of the European Union.

We consider it to be natural that the ideal family model changes over the centuries, and both earlier and modern models have their positive and negative aspects. Nevertheless, we are aware of the fact that the individualist and consumerist attitude of our current culture



that absolutizes the freedom of the individual puts lasting human relationships and childbearing at a disadvantage. We see worrying signs of this tendency: the plunge in the number of new marriages, the rising number of divorces, the falling number of two-parent families, the dramatic deterioration of the demographic situation, the careless practice of abortions, and the spreading lifestyle of singleness based on selfishness. We do not consider marriage to be an exclusively private issue; we believe it is one of the most sacred and personal issues of the community.

Our churches are ready to use the tools at their disposal to help marriage and the joys of family become sources of a happy life for all Christians and European citizens, because

we believe that through mutual service and sacrifices we can turn into better human beings, and families can form the basis of social prosperity and the preservation of values. To achieve these aims, we primarily support the development of professional and family policy programmes as well as the creation of consultation systems, in ecumenical co-operation.

## Our service for the Roma communities

In Hungary, Roma communities have been an inseparable part of society for centuries. In the life of churches, service among the Roma has always primarily meant spreading the Gospel. Over the last century, this activity has gradually been complemented with other forms of help to facilitate their integration into society, such as educational and social assistance.

The attitude of our churches towards Roma people is the same as towards any other group of people: they need to hear the message of the Gospel and experience the love of God in order to change and discover new meanings in their lives, and find their true self-identity through a relationship with God. We strive to bear witness to the love of God not only in the form of words, but also with the help of the

various tools of our diaconical services, so that those in need can break out of the prison of the indigence and uncertainty that plagues them.

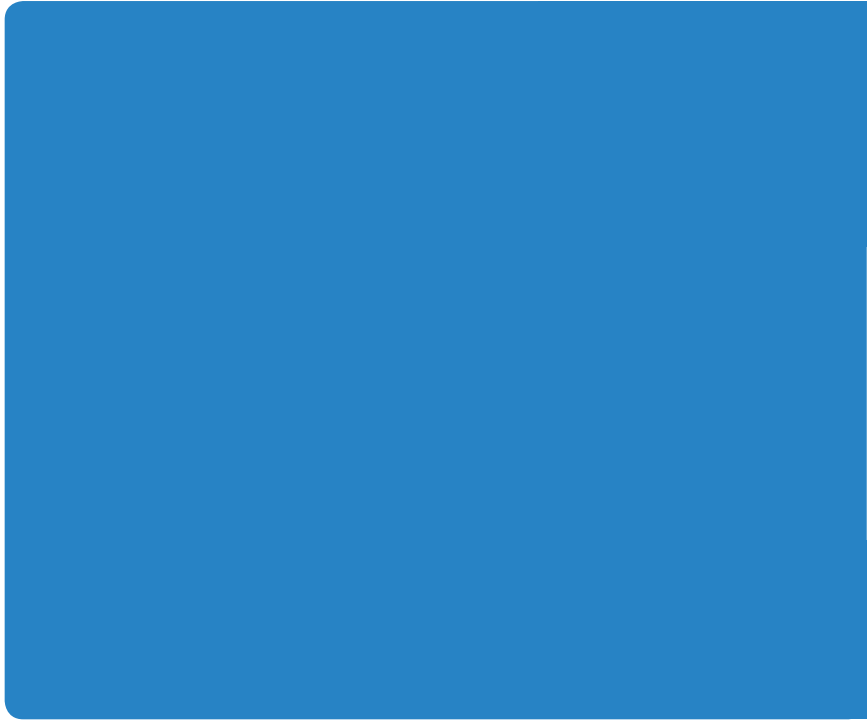
The church services among the Roma are special because they are centred around the community. Instead of the individualist, human rights protection-type of approach that has been prevalent for decades, we consider solidarity and the mutual respect of various communities as the opportunity for development. That is why we deem it important to enable Hungarian and Roma communities to get to know each other, through the recognition and systematisation of the work in the field of service among the Roma, and primarily within our own communities. We are committed to involve those members of the Roma communities who





would like to co-operate with us in our services. In our view, education is of pivotal importance to facilitate the integration and advancement of the Roma. We believe that the strengthening of the Roma community's diverse cultural life needs to be facilitated, and a greater awareness about Roma culture has to be achieved.

With their centuries-old experience, Hungarian churches can contribute effectively to finding solutions to the problems of the Roma on a European level. We hope that during the Hungarian EU Presidency, the European Union's decision-makers will be made aware of the fact that this issue can only be resolved if prejudices and rigid stereotypes are left behind. Furthermore, it is only through this approach that steps can be taken to achieve a European-regulated education and social system that enhances social integration.



# *Europe as a Frame of Reference*



*Presentation by Rüdiger Noll, Director of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC of CEC), Associate General Secretary of CEC, regarding the Hungarian EU Presidency, at the General Assembly of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary, 6 December 2010.*

It is true, for many people Europe is not a frame of reference for their reflection and action. Lectures on European issues do not attract big audiences. We can see that clearly in the number of participants in seminars on Europe in Christian Academies all over Europe. It also becomes evident, when we look on the declining participation in elections to the European Parliament, though the legislative powers of the European Parliament increased. And I remember in the Hungarian referendum prior to Hungary becoming member of the EU in 2004 an overwhelming majority of voters voted in favour, but only about 44% of the Hungarians have participated in the referendum.

For many the European Institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg are just far away and seem to have little to do with the everyday life. This might be a feeling out of ignorance, not knowing how important the European Institutions have become for the everyday life of the people. This feeling might have its origins in a feeling of powerlessness: the decisions seem to be taken so far away, that ordinary people as well as Christians and churches anyhow have no chance of influencing them. Since there is no chance, we should not even attempt to try. And in the eyes

of some, "Brussels" even seems to be such a superpower, that I have heard in some central and eastern European countries language such as: 'Thus far we have received the orders from Moscow, now we are receiving them from Brussels'. "Mistrust" towards the Institutions, which the European states have given themselves and to which they have transferred certain competences, is a very modest word to describe this approach of people.

Such approaches do not do justice to the European integration process and to the importance of the European organisations, such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe and, most important, the European Union. As my elderly friend, Prof Papaderos from Crete always reminds me, according to Greek mythology, Europe is a beautiful woman. And we should honour her.

After WWII, what is now the European Union began as a peace and reconciliation project — making the European economies so dependent on each other, that European states can never afford again to go to war with each other. And it turned out to be a very successful project, which did not only bring about peace, but also prosperity and freedom. But yes, these

developments also went along with member states transferring numerous competences to the European Institutions in Brussels and in Strasbourg. The former German President and judge of the Constitutional Court, Roman Herzog, a few years ago went as far as to estimate that more than 80% of the national legislation in EU member countries is either pre-decided or prepared in the European Institutions.

Many of today's problems cannot be solved within the nation state. Environmental damages do not stop at national borders. The recent financial and economic crisis made it evident how important the trans-national cooperation is. In a time of globalisation, we need our own identities, but we also need the global cooperation for the well-being of the people and of God's creation.

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## EUROPE AS A FRAME OF REFERENCE FOR THE CHURCHES?!

Now, why should we as churches be involved in all of this? Well, if it is true that the future of the people in Europe (not only in the European Union) is determined by the European Institutions, we as churches have to be there, we have to be present and we have to raise our voice as advocates for the people and for God's creation. To say it with the Barmen Theological Declaration from 1934: "As Jesus Christ is God's assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so, in the same way and with the same seriousness he is also God's mighty claim upon our whole life. . . . We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus

Christ, but to other lords — areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him". As Christians we have to proclaim the word of the gospel also where the political and the legal framework of Europe is decided.

When the churches in Europe, in 2001, adopted the Charta Oecumenica, they said; "We are convinced that the spiritual heritage of Christianity constitutes an empowering source of inspiration and enrichment for Europe. On the basis of our 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. We likewise in-



sist on the reverence for life, the value of marriage and the family, the preferential option for the poor, the readiness to forgive, and in all things compassion.” As churches we have to be advocates for a just, participatory and sustainable Europe in the world.

From this basis, Christians and churches have something to say to Europe. We should be advocates of the achievements of the European integration process thus far, but we also have many critical things to say. Let me just give but some examples, which will be issues during the Hungarian EU Presidency.

As churches we have always advocated that economic growth has to be in balance with social cohesion and social justice. The recent financial and economic crisis has revealed that we cannot just continue with business as usual and a few cosmetic corrections. The financial and economic crisis is a challenge to our underlying values and our lifestyles. As the European Union is now starting to implement its strategy for the years until 2020, it is high time to highlight social justice and social cohesion as part of its strategy. In 2006, at a church leaders’ meeting, which the Church and Society Commission of CEC had organised, Bishop Bölcskei said: “It has been clearly proven in recent times that citizens expect stronger social commitment from the European Union. The implementation of social tasks,

however, is clearly a duty of member states, and due to the subsidiarity principle, that of regions and settlements too. . . . Through the role in education and social care, churches may improve Europe’s role in social matters and may contribute to people considering the European Union as a community that deems social care an important issue.” This reads already like a manifesto for the forthcoming Hungarian EU Presidency.

The above mentioned frustrations in dealing with European issues to a large extent have their root cause in the decisions taken too far away from the people and in a largely in-transparent manner. I am therefore very happy that the Hungarian government has made it one of its priorities to “bring Europe closer to its citizens”. We need institutions that listen to the voices of the people, which take up their concerns. We need institutions that are transparent and involve the people in the decision-making process.

Europe is bigger than the European Union. As Conference of European Churches we have been always proud not to just bring the voice of the churches in EU member states to the Institutions, but from the churches from all over Europe. I am therefore very grateful for the churches in Hungary to approach the Hungarian EU Presidency from a regional perspective. The Visegrad countries might be a frame of reference, the Carpathian basis

or the Danube region. With this a much broader perspective immediately comes into play, taking up the fears that still exist among neighbours and the need for reconciliation and inter-cultural dialogue among formerly conflicting parties. During the Hungarian Presidency, a Danube Strategy will be put into action. Thus far it is dominated by economic and environmental issues, but with entry points for concrete action on inter-cultural dialogue and processes of reconciliation.

I could mention many more issues which are at stake during the Hungarian EU Presidency; issues such as the role of volunteering in out societies, family life, a Roma strategy, combating climate change on a global scale. In all of these issues, churches have important contributions to make.

And there are many open doors for the churches to make a difference. In the basic Treaty of the European Union (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union), the “Lisbon Treaty”, there is now a legally binding article, in which recognizes the identity of the churches and religious communities and their special contribution. In this article (17.3), the European Union is committing itself to an “open, transparent and regular dialogue” with the churches and the religious communities.

Discussions with the Hungarian government thus far give reason to believe, that the Hungarian EU Presidency is very inter-

ested in this dialogue with the churches and is looking forward to the churches’ contribution.

But let’s also remain realistic. There are limits to what an EU Presidency can do under the new EU Treaty and in view of a new permanent President of the European Council. There will be hundreds of legal acts to be pursued, which the Hungarian Presidency will have to deal with, whether it likes it or not. On top of that, there is only a little space to set own priorities. All the more, we should be happy that the Hungarian government has committed itself to a Presidency with a “human face” and wanting to be an “honest broker”. Among its four priorities one is “to bring Europe closer to the people”.

It seems to be that the Hungarian churches have a special opportunity here, but also a special challenge, that is to make a meaningful contribution not only on behalf of themselves but also on behalf of all the churches in Europe and even in the world. This is why I am looking forward to a fruitful cooperation between the churches in Hungary and the Conference of European Churches. Preparations make me very hopeful. As Conference of European Churches we want to support the Hungarian churches as much as possible in their efforts.

One thing should be clear to all of us, though: we will only be able to make a difference as churches, if we speak in as much





as possible with a common voice to the European Institutions, including the Hungarian Presidency. In the Charta Oecumenica from 2001, the churches in Europe commit themselves to “to seek agreement with one another on the substance and goals of our social responsibility, and to represent in concert, as far

as possible, the concerns and visions of the churches vis-à-vis the secular European institutions”. This is why I am so happy to that besides preparations in individual churches, the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary will serve as a focal point for the churches’ efforts for the Presidency.

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## *EXPERIENCES OF THE CHURCHES WITH PREVIOUS EU PRESIDENCIES*

There is a long-standing history of churches engaging with EU Presidencies. In almost all cases in the recent past, CEC and COMECE together with the churches of the respective country visited government assuming the Presidency. There is a long record of meetings with Prime Ministers or Foreign Ministers and their staff. There is also an established series of government organised conferences, in which the churches participated. And many churches developed their own programmes and relations according to their priorities.

It seems to me important, however, that from the outset the churches are clear on their aims. Why do we engage with a Presidency? There were several aims during previous years:

- » TO USE A PRESIDENCY TO HIGHLIGHT SPECIAL ISSUES OF CONCERN FOR THE CHURCHES IN ORDER TO USE THE PRESIDENCY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE;
- » TO MAKE EUROPEAN ISSUES MORE VISIBLE TO PEOPLE IN THE CHURCHES’ CONGREGATIONS IN ORDER TO SHOW HOW EUROPE CAN BE USEFUL FOR THEM AND TO ENGAGE THEM;
- » TO MAKE THE CHURCHES VISIBLE IN SOCIETY IN THEIR ADVOCACY ROLE FOR THE GOOD OF THE PEOPLE;
- » TO RE-STRENGTHEN THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CHURCHES AND THE RESPECTIVE GOVERNMENT;
- » TO SUPPORT A GOVERNMENT IN ITS EFFORTS TO PROMOTE JUSTICE, SUSTAINABILITY AND THE PARTICIPATION OF THE PEOPLE;
- » TO PROMOTE THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS.

These are not exclusive aims. But the churches should be clear about their priority aims and the means to achieve them. Perhaps, one can roughly distinguish between two sets of aims: those that rather aim at making a difference vis-à-vis the government and those that want to make the churches visible and strengthen them in relation to the public and European agenda. Both are not exclusive and the latter set of aims should by no means lead us to become defensive and protective of our own ambitions. In relation to the EU Presidency, we should present ourselves as advocates for the common good from a Christian perspective — a church for others.

Hungary is not the first country to assume the EU Presidency from the countries formerly east of the Iron curtain. Slovenia already assumed the EU Presidency and last year, the Czech Republic hold the Presidency. And the churches in the Czech Republic, having had not the easiest of all relations to their government, used the occasion under the guidance of the Ecumenical Council to make their viewpoints visible on many issues. They published a booklet with a presentation of the churches and their concerns, accompanied with a CD which compiled the basic texts of the churches and of CEC on these issues.

The church leaders of the Czech Republic together visited Brussels and were received by the Czech Commissioner and

Czech parliamentarians, which created quite a clout for the churches' commitment.

Let me use this occasion of my presentation to express an invitation also to a delegation of the Churches from Hungary to visit Brussels during the Presidency to make their concerns visible and heard; and perhaps, also to learn more about the functioning of the European institutions.

The experience with the Czech Presidency makes me ask for one possible aim to be added to the list of potential aims for the churches in Hungary. At the time of the Czech Presidency, the time did not seem ripe for Europe to listen to a specific voice from a new EU member country. But may be the time is ripe now. Therefore, may express a wish and add one aim to the list of potential aims for the Hungarian Presidency:

» TO BRING A GENUINE VOICE OF THE CHURCHES FROM CENTRAL EUROPE INTO THE EUROPEAN DEBATE. WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC CONCERNS OF THE CHURCHES IN CENTRAL EUROPE. WHAT ARE THEIR HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS EUROPE, WHAT ARE THEIR FEARS AND ANXIETIES?

This might be an aim to pursued especially together with the Polish churches, whose country will assume the EU Presidency after Hungary. The Visegrad, the Danube, the Carpathian regions might serve as frames of reference for a regional approach.



There were other Presidencies before and around the Czech Presidency. Let me just mention as an example the Swedish EU Presidency. The churches in Sweden, again with a working group under the Christian Council (much resources by the biggest church: the Church of Sweden) worked in both directions. They selected four priorities to be pursued with the government during the Presidency. They published a book with their priorities, which we formally handed over at a meeting with the then Swedish Europe Minister, Cecilia Malmström, who is today the Swedish Commissioner in Brussels for Justice and Home Affairs. (One always meets twice in life, they say. And good connections stay on!) The priorities of the Swedish churches were accompanied by an extensive media campaign, which ensured that people got to know about the churches' priorities and articles appeared in important newspaper on the priorities selected for each month. At the same time, the churches in Sweden published a bigger book with information and educational material for church congregations, which was widely used and did raise the awareness about the churches' involvement in European affairs and the backing for it considerably. We worked closely

together between Brussels and Uppsala in order to ensure the same emphasis on the national and on the European level. Many of my colleagues were speakers and resource persons in events of the Swedish churches.

At the CEC Assembly in Lyon in 2009, we formally handed over from the Swedish churches to the Czech churches with regard to the EU Presidency. A moment marked by publications, good wishes, good advice and Becherovka and sweets. Cooperation and mutual support serves all well.

Equally to the Swedes, churches in other countries were also very active and used the EU Presidency of their countries to intensify their relations with the government, to raise awareness and to engage in numerous initiatives on their priorities. And usually, the respective governments were very receptive. The present Belgium EU Presidency, for instance, involves NGOs in an almost unprecedented way. The concluding conference to the "European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion", for instance, also involved people being effected by poverty and social exclusion themselves.

## AN EU PRESIDENCY AND BEYOND

To conclude: the experience shows that the churches can make a difference when it comes to EU Presidencies. And that is an important contribution.

But it might be, however, that someone would say: it is putting too much energy into a one-off period of time. Well, my hope would be that investing in an EU Presidency would pay off in the long run. Our preparations and our involvement should therefore also take into account, how we will continue in the long-run. Which middle-term and long-term effects do we want to achieve in investing so much in the first half of 2011?

In this regard, the cooperation with churches in other countries seems to me to be important. Poland is assuming the EU

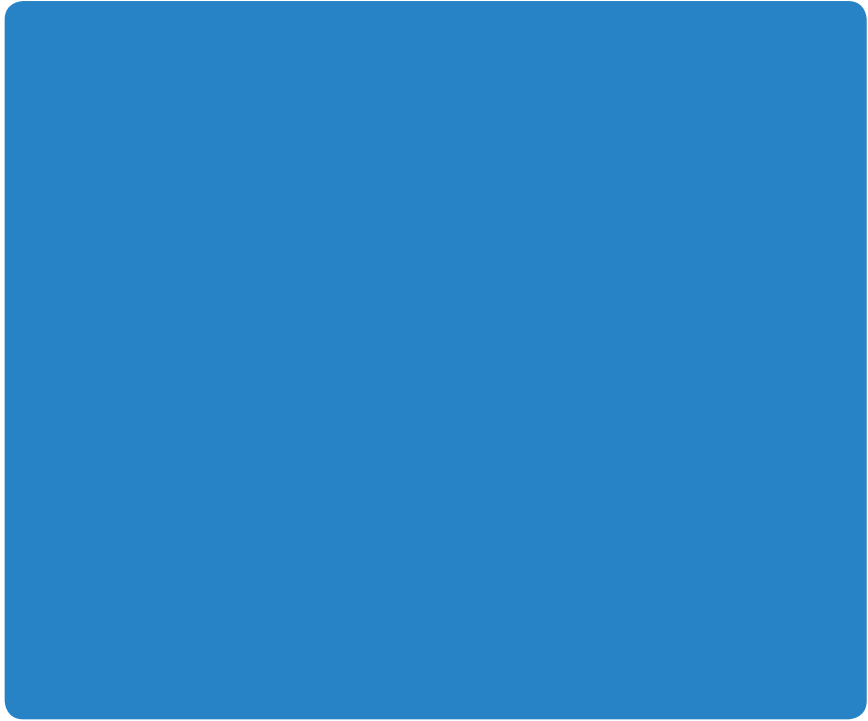
Presidency after Hungary, and the churches in Poland have already started with their considerations and are very willing to cooperate through their Ecumenical Council with the churches in Hungary. Looking on middle-term and long-term effects, the regional approach to an EU Presidency might be of help. What's about using the Visegrad concept for establishing a central European churches' agenda?

As we have said, it is high time that Europe listens to the voice and the experiences of the churches in central and eastern Europe. It is high time that the ecumenical movement engages in a new way with the churches in this region. As CEC, being committed to a pan-European vision of Europe, we would want to do our utmost to support the churches on this journey.

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# *Calendar of Events*



*16 January 2011*

*ECUMENICAL WORSHIP*

Venue: Reformed Congregation  
of Budapest-Fasor, Budapest

Opening worship of the Ecumenical  
Week of Prayer, also a supplication  
for the beginning of the Hungarian  
EU Presidency  
(public event)

*17 January 2011*

*MEETING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER*

Venue: Prime Minister's Office,  
Budapest

Meeting of representatives of the  
Ecumenical Council of Churches in  
Hungary, representatives of its member  
churches, as well as representatives  
of European Ecumenical organisations  
(CSC of CEC and COMECE) with  
the Prime Minister and members  
of the Hungarian government

*January-February 2011*

*CONSULTATION OF CENTRAL-  
EUROPEAN ECUMENICAL COUNCILS*

Venue: ECCH, Budapest

Consultation opening the Hungarian EU  
Presidency with the participation of the  
representatives of the Central-European  
Ecumenical councils on the regional  
opportunities of the Hungarian EU  
Presidency from the perspective  
of churches

*14 February 2011*

*INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATION  
ON THE EU'S ROMA STRATEGY*

Venue: Reformed Church in Hungary,  
Synod Office, Budapest

Professional consultation of experts  
of the member churches of ECCH,  
the Church and Society Commission,  
the Churches' Commission for Migrants  
in Europe and Eurodiaconia  
on European Roma Framework and  
the draft of the Hungarian  
government's Roma strategy

*February-March 2011*

*CHURCH LEADERS' VISIT TO BRUSSELS*

Venue: Brussels

Leaders of ECCH and leaders of its  
member churches visit European Union  
institutions on the invitation of the  
Church and Society Commission

*10-12 March 2011*

*CHURCHES' SERVICE  
IN SOCIAL RECONCILIATION*

*CENTRAL-EUROPE: THE MODEL  
OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY*

Venue: ECCH, Budapest

Conference of the Reconciliation  
Foundation and ECCH on religious  
and cultural diversity with  
the participation of Central-European  
church leaders and experts  
(public event)



*30 March 2011*

ROMA EXPERTS FORUM

Venue: ECCH, Budapest

Professional consultation of ECCH member churches' representatives and experts in charge of Roma mission

*late April 2011*

PROFESSIONAL FORUM ON FAMILIES

Venue: ECCH, Budapest

Conference on the family policy of EU in light of the social teachings of churches

*June 2011*

EUROPEAN UNION

AND CHURCHES SUMMIT

Venue: Brussels

Annual meeting of the President of the Council of the European Union, the President of the European Commission, and the President of the European Parliament with the representatives of European churches and the representatives of the churches from the EU president country

*15 June 2011*

NETWORK CONFERENCE  
ON VOLUNTEERING

Venue: ECCH, Budapest

On the occasion of the European Year of Volunteering, the presentation of church experience and good practices of volunteering programmes realised within and beyond schools (public event)

*June-July 2011*

HUNGARIAN-POLISH EU PRESIDENCY  
HANDOVER

Venue: to be announced later

Church ceremony to mark the handover of the EU Presidency from Hungary to Poland

ECCH Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary  
Magyar tudósok krt. 3, Budapest 1117

For more information on the above programmes and public events, visit the website of ECCH: [www.meot.hu](http://www.meot.hu)  
(available in Hungarian)

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