

International Organizations

D R A F T 5 October 2015, Provo, Utah
Elizabeta Kitanovic

Introduction

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is a fellowship of some 114 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches from all countries of Europe, plus 40 national council of churches and organizations in partnership. CEC was founded in 1959. It has offices in Brussels and Strasbourg.

This organization was born during the time of the cold war when churches didn't support living in the divided Europe and they didn't accept the cold war divisions. Freedom of religion or belief is fundamental human rights and it is practiced by minorities as well as majorities.

Churches have been preaching and practicing the concept of justice due their own historical development. For CEC member churches, it was always clear that religious freedom or belief is the fundamental right of every person living on the earth recognizing at the same time forum internum and forum externum within the religious freedom principle. This means that, whether as an individual or in the community, this right is exercised and granted by International Human Rights Law. Even if the legislative framework is very clear the part of its implementation still remains. Human Rights in general are the area where the churches have permanent work to do: whether to defend their own interests or to advocate for the rights of others.

How CEC engage itself in the dialogue with European Institutions?

European Commission

Vis-à-vis the European Union CEC has developed relations with its main institutions. Concerning the European Commission, CEC has established long time ago dialogue on different sectorial policies like; human rights, social affairs, bioethics, climate change and environments, intercultural and interreligious dialogue ect. In terms of the legislative framework, when we come to the EU human rights system, we have the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights which became legally binding in 2009 with the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty. The Lisbon Treaty underlines that the

inspiration for the European Union is drawn from the “cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe¹”. In article 10 of the TFEU² it was stipulated that in *defining* and *implementing* its policies, the Union will combat discrimination based on ...religion or belief. In article 13 respect for religious rites and cultural traditions were underlined. Finally article 17 invited the churches, religious communities and philosophical and non-confessional organisations to an “open, transparent and regular dialogue” with the European Institutions.

CEC together with its counterpart COMECE has established twice per year dialogue seminars with the European Commission based on the art. 17 TFEU. This dialogue is much older than the article in the Lisbon treaty.

The European Commission has also other projects where churches and religious communities, philosophical and non-confessional organizations are invited to contribute to. One of recent events took place on the 1-2 October 2015 - Annual colloquium on Fundamental rights “Tolerance and respect: preventing and combating anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe³.” This colloquium was set up as one of the responses of the EC after the terrorist attacks in Paris (France), Copenhagen (Denmark) on the territory of the EU in 2015.

The fear concerning security of European Jews has increased as well as anti-Muslim hatred which has included physical and verbal violence. This project was set up in order to look into the deep roots and origins of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslims incidents in the European Union which do have an impact on growing fear in European society.

This consultation discussed the questions such as: what is the role and responsibility of society in combating anti-Muslim hatred and anti-Semitism? What are the legal mechanisms needed for the European Union to combat the hate crimes against different religious groups? How can the EU assure the legal framework for helping victims and combat racism and xenophobia? What is the role of the schools related to human rights education, citizenship, training, Holocaust Remembrance?

¹ Gerhard Robbers, Religion-Related Norms in European Union Law, collected by Christine Schmidt-König, Update: December 2010. Trier University, 2001.

² Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

³ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/colloquium-fundamental-rights-2015/files/colloquium_agenda_18_september_web_en.pdf 30.09.2015

In the final statement of the conference organized by CEC and Ecumenical Patriarchate “Advancing freedom of religion or belief for all” which took place in Halki from 6-9 September 2015 the churches suggested to the European Institution that they should:

“ * Report on the state of fundamental religious freedoms of beliefs within the countries of the EU relating to discrimination based on religion or belief, hate speech, discriminatory legislation, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism etc.

* Publish separate report on the situation on religious freedom or belief outside the EU.

* Encourage high standards and implementation of human rights in respect of the treatment of migrants and asylum seekers.”⁴

In the **European Parliament** there is the EP Intergroup on freedom of religion or belief and religious tolerance⁵. CEC has developed cooperation with the MEPs dealing with freedom of religion or belief. When CEC member church face with violations of freedom of religion or belief CEC informs this EP working group about it. The EP WG collects the data related to violations of freedom of religion or belief and publish them in their Annual Report. This reports relates to the violation of religious freedom outside of the EU.

CEC has developed also relationship with the **EU FRA**, which was previously called Monitoring center against racism and xenophobia. The EU FRA has EU FRP where CEC is the member since 2008. CEC contributed to the platforms work in discussing Human Rights Training Manuel for European Churches, which CEC issued in 2012. The platform proof to be very useful place for finding the partners, good human rights advocates who deal with all range of human rights and advocate for respect of the universality of human rights.

The **Council of the European Union** has special task force, which is dealing with intercultural dialogue and human rights. Through its memberships in Human Rights and Democracy Network, CEC is updated on the current human rights issues which are on the agenda of the EU member states.

⁴ http://www.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/cec/Statement_Halki_9_Sept_15.pdf 30 09 2015

⁵ <http://www.religiousfreedom.eu> 5 October 2015

Council of Europe

CEC has established office vis-à-vis the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. It has membership in the CoE NGO Platform. On this basis, CEC is invited to provide its expertise related to the project on Interreligious dimension of Intercultural dialogue based on the CoE White paper on Interreligious dialogue.

United Nations

As concerning the **UN**, CEC has close ties with the office of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and Mr. Heiner Bielefeld.

OSCE

As for the **OSCE**, CEC participate in different round tables which are relevant for the work of the CEC member churches but also Human Rights dimension and implementation meetings.

To witness human rights commitment of European churches CEC works closely with civil society organizations.