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## THE COMMUNION OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES IN EUROPE AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

### WSPÓLNOTA KOŚCIOŁÓW EWANGELICKICH W EUROPIE A INTEGRACJA EUROPEJSKA

#### ABSTRACT

The Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) is currently a communion of 96 Protestant Churches of various traditions from over 30 European countries, representing over 50 million Christians in Europe and beyond, including South America. In its founding document – the Leuenberg Agreement – it declared the realization of the Church communion, in three areas: continuing theological conversation, ecumenical, witness and service. The aim of this article is to present how the topic of European integration is being reflected on in these three areas of CPCE work. The analysis will be supplemented by a review of the references to European integration in the programmatic documents adopted by the highest governing body of the CPCE – its general assemblies.

Wspólnota Kościołów Ewangelickich w Europie (CPCE) jest obecnie wspólnotą 96 Kościołów protestanckich różnych tradycji z ponad 30 krajów europejskich, reprezentującą ponad 50 milionów chrześcijan w Europie i poza nią, w tym w Ameryce Południowej. W swoim dokumencie założycielskim – Konkordii Leuenberskiej – zadeklarowała realizację wspólnoty kościelnej w trzech obszarach: ciągłej rozmowie teologicznej, ekumenizmie, świadectwie i służbie. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie, w jaki sposób temat integracji europejskiej jest odzwierciedlony w tych trzech obszarach działalności CPCE. Analiza zostanie uzupełniona przeglądem odniesień do integracji europejskiej w dokumentach programowych przyjętych przez najwyższy organ zarządzający CPCE – zgromadzenia ogólne.

The Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) is currently a communion of 96 Protestant Churches of various traditions from over 30 European countries, representing over 50 million Christians in Europe and beyond, including South America. The starting point for its creation was the signing in 1973 of the Leuenberg Agreement between the Churches of the Lutheran, Reformed, Union traditions, as well as the Waldensians and the Czech Brethren (cf. Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2011b). This document contains doctrinal

agreements on the proclamation of the Gospel and the understanding of the sacraments, resolving disputes between these traditions that originated in the 16th century and enabling them to declare pulpit and altar fellowship. The Churches that signed the Leuenberg Agreement created the Leueberg Church Fellowship. In 1993, it was joined by Churches of the Methodist tradition, and in 2003 it changed its name to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, and then to the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (cf. Karski 2007, 140-146).

The basis of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe – the Leuenberg Agreement – is not only an agreement proposing a consensus in the face of doctrinal disputes dividing Protestantism, but also a program for the future. In the part devoted to the realization of the church communion, such points as witness and service, continuing doctrinal conversations appeared, and ecumenical aspects were also indicated (cf. Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2011b, no. 35-49). In these three areas, it is possible to indicate how the CPCE realizes its interest in the processes of European integration. The subsequent parts of this paper will also be devoted to them, preceded by a reference to several fundamental program decisions of the General Assemblies of the CPCE.

### **Program decisions of the General Assemblies of the CPCE**

The first reference to the European context appeared directly in the work of the highest body of the CPCE during the 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Vienna in 1994. In the program document “Structure and future work of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship,” in the section devoted to “Witness and service” we read: “The link with existing regional and European institutions must be significantly strengthened. There are various organisations which are active at a Europe-wide level in missionary, charitable, diaconal and social welfare work. The churches of the LCF are linked to these existing European networks (Eurodiakonia, Cimade, Gustav Adolf Werk, Martin Luther Bund etc.) through their work and orientation. The link with these networks has to be built up. These links and possibilities are to be understood as part of the commitment of the LCF to witness and service. In the political area of the process of uniting and changing Europe, there are already some church ministries in existence (at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg as well as at the European Union in Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg). Here also the LCF ought to develop a joint presence” (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 1994, 1).

The above mentioned readiness for pan-European involvement, not only in the diaconal or missionary areas, was confirmed by the Fifth General Assembly in Belfast (2001) in its final report in the section “Witness and service: Protestant Voices in Europe”: “The Leuenberg Church Fellowship should be put in a position of being able to give a clear Protestant witness on important current questions of politics, society and ecumenical matters, in a way which is more prominent and up-to-date than it has been previously. In particular it needs to bolster the presence

of the Protestant Churches at a European level. Here use needs to be made of already existing structures of co-operation, especially the Conference of European Churches. These structures and forms of cooperation should be deepened.”<sup>1</sup>

The change of name, which in 2003 clearly indicates the regional format of the community of Churches that is the CPCE, should also be considered significant in this context. The previous version of the name did not have this limitation<sup>2</sup>. It should be remembered that in the discussions in the CPCE on the characteristics of the ethical and social statements of the CPCE, it was emphasized that: “The member Churches of CPCE come from (almost) all European countries, not just those of the EU. They also include the Latin American member Churches. This means the horizon of CPCE is not limited to Europe, let alone the European Union, but has in view the whole «oikoumene», the inhabited earth.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Theological and doctrinal conversation**

References to Europe and its integration have found their special place in one of the most important threads of the CPCE doctrinal discussions – namely the ecclesiological debate. The reflections of the key CPCE ecclesiological document “The Church of Jesus Christ” (1994, cf. Bünker, Friedrich 2018) have found their continuation, among others, in the discussions under the slogan “Church-People-State-Nation” led by members of the South and Southeast Europe Regional Group of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. The resulting study document “Church–People–State–Nation. A Contribution to a Difficult Relationship” was adopted by the Fifth General Assembly in Belfast in 2001. The subject appears in the final, sixth chapter, which is devoted to “Current Challenges.” The issue of “Position and tasks of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship in European integration” will be discussed last, after reflecting on “The danger of nationalism” and “Criteria for the Churches’ relation to people, nation, state and society” (Hüffmeier 2002, 147-159).

The reflection began with a look at the idea of European unification. It pointed to its roots in “yearning for peaceful coexistence” (Hüffmeier 2002, 155) as well as the current “growing hope for reaching a clearly political unity and a cultural identity” (Hüffmeier 2002, 155) and the expectations of the countries of Central, Eastern and Southern Europe to join the EU. It also pointed to the ambivalence of globalization processes. Asking about the role of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship Churches in this process, it indicated their readiness to support its success, especially since this process is diagnosed as “trying to create humane living conditions between nationalism and globality” (Hüffmeier 2002, 155). They see this as a continuation of their roots in European history since the Reformation, and

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from: Heidtmann 2013, 41. Cf. Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft 2003, 386.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from: Heidtmann 2013, 41. Cf. Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft 2003, 386.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from: Heidtmann 2013, 47.

they also treat it as a result of their common understanding of the Gospel, which encourages witness and service (Hüffmeier 2002, 155).

The next part of the reflections concerns the hope for God's presence amidst various challenges and negative experiences in Europe. At the same time, this hope is combined with a critical view of Europe's role in the world – not as having a “special mission,” but as having a special “task of making a contribution to worldwide justice, peace and the integrity of creation” (Hüffmeier 2002, 156). Relying on God's presence leads to the rejection of false gods, or ideological exaltation of Europe. This is a vision not of a Europe as a fortress fighting with other continents, but of a Europe experiencing the closeness of God and ready to pass it on to others (Hüffmeier 2002, 155-156).

This leads to a look at “Encounter with others.” It was pointed out that EU integration brings people closer, sometimes more than they would like. This gives rise to fears, which are understandable. Working to overcome them is crucial. Europe is assessed not as a threat to the autonomy of states and individuals but as a chance for encounter and diversity. At the same time, postulates are formulated for more democracy and transparency within EU institutions. CPCE churches are particularly interested in individual rights and the protection of minorities (Hüffmeier 2002, 156-157).

The authors continue their considerations with the “Ethics of treating differences.” It is pointed out that Europe is not a uniform identity, but within the European community we experience differences. When they become destructive, they should be overcome as much as possible. In this context, the importance of documents such as the “Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union” from 2000 is emphasized (cf. European Parliament, Council of the European, European Commission 2000). The Protestant perspective emphasizes in this context the responsibility and involvement of individuals for the benefit of society. The problem of unemployment is given as an example of necessary cooperation at the European level, indicating the need to introduce measures to counteract internal competition between EU countries in order to strengthen reconciliation and economic participation (Hüffmeier 2002, 157).

The penultimate part of the reflection focuses on “Protestantism in the transformation process.” The novelty of integrating Europe for the Protestant Churches is indicated, but at the same time their tradition of openness and the possibility of contributing the message of the liberating experience of God towards calming tensions concerning the Churches and their members in the national or state context (e.g. language conflicts or the situation of minorities in European countries) is indicated. All this is seen in the context of Protestantism's autocritical reflection on itself and the care and presence of the Protestant voice among other voices in Europe. There also appears here the postulate of “critical solidarity” reaching beyond the European integration project (Hüffmeier 2002, 158).

The reflection on integrating Europe ends with the section devoted to “Ecumenical responsibility.” Europe is seen in it as a challenge and an opportunity for

the ecumenical commitment of the member Churches of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. It is emphasized that a lasting Christian contribution is provided by taking care of it through means of ecumenical cooperation. The two European Ecumenical Assemblies organized jointly by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of the (Catholic) European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE, Concilium Conferentiarum Episcopaliu[m] Europae) in Basel (1989) and Graz (1997) were assessed positively in this context. At the same time, the Leuenberg Church Fellowship does not so much advocate the re-evangelization of Europe, but rather the European inculturation of the Gospel, that is, "proclaiming the good news in Europe in a particular form" (Hüffmeier 2002, 159). The Leuenberg Church Fellowship does not deny the Christian roots of Europe, but rejects the confusion of the common proclamation of the Gospel with "the idea of a repristination of Western Christendom" (Hüffmeier 2002, 159). Hence the demand for dialogue between the Churches – within the Leuenberg Church Fellowship and more broadly ecumenically – regarding the processes of European integration (Hüffmeier 2002, 158-159).

The subject of European integration is also present in the CPCE discussion on the shaping of the identity of Protestant Churches in Europe. This is expressed in the study document "The Shape and Shaping of Protestant Churches in a Changing Europe" adopted by the Sixth General Assembly of the CPCE in Budapest in 2006 (Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) – Leuenberg Church Fellowship 2006). This text tries to analyse the criteria for shaping the Protestant identity in Europe, its ecumenical implications, and also discusses in Chapter 3: "Europe as a space for the life and shaping of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe – opportunities and challenges." When defining Europe, it does not refer so much to its geographical dimension, but rather to Europe as a unifying idea associated mainly with the European Union and cooperation in the economic field. At the same time, it indicates the variety of historical, cultural, national or religious experiences that constitute European diversity that does not lend itself to unification. It indicates, however, that these local and regional memories and characteristics can become one of the elements of the integration process, which adds another layer of references to common European experiences, e.g. historical ones. Protestantism, and especially the experience of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, is seen here as a possible model for critical self-reflection and healing memories. Protestantism supports in this context the need for dialogue, emphasis on education, combining individual freedom with obligation and solidarity towards the community. Indicating the challenges for the Churches in Europe, the authors point to political, economic, cultural and fundamental values, and secularization and pluralism. In the summary, the authors of the documents state: "The process of European union and integration faces difficult political, economic and ethical questions, a solution for which is being sought. The Protestant churches in Europe as they are united in the CPCE can make an important contribution to this in carrying out their mission. They argue for the humanization of Europe by bearing witness to God's love for all men and women. Moreover, they have

experiences in balancing diversity and commitment, difference and community, which could also be important for a Europe of nations and regions. Therefore they must develop procedures to strengthen their common voice and their witness, in public and transparent dialogue and in common action” (Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) – Leuenberg Church Fellowship 2006, 21).

Finally, European integration is the point of reference for the CPCE dialogue on ethical issues. In 2012, the CPCE published a comprehensive analysis summarizing the activity of its member Churches in speaking out in the public ethical debate. This document is entitled “Stand up for justice The Ethical Discernment and Social Commitment of the Protestant Churches in Europe” (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2013c). The basis for its preparation were several dozen documents of the CPCE member Churches on ethical issues. Among other things, it addressed the context in which they were formulated, emphasizing the context of European integration. It pointed out its Western European roots and the significance of the changes brought about by the fall of the Iron Curtain. Finally, it emphasized the role of the Churches in this process, especially in the context of debates on the fundamental values (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2013c, 195-196) of European integration, which are coming to the fore, for example, in the debate on the European Constitution (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2013c, 208-209).

An important element of the document in question is the “Social commitment of the Protestant churches in Europe.” We read in it: “As Protestant Churches in Europe we commit ourselves:/ To give a clear Protestant witness in questions of politics, economics and society;/ To care for human rights, democracy and the rule of law for people at all places and all times of life;/ To stand up for justice, providing opportunities and access for everyone according to his or her gifts;/ To work for a just sharing of resources;/ To build up communities and to serve those in need;/ To give open welcome, shelter and protection to refugees and migrants and to oppose racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism;/ To work for peace between nations and cultures and to promote non-violent conflict prevention and solutions in all areas of life;/ To exercise stewardship of all God’s creation and to work for more sustainable ways of living;/ To promote Christian values, attitudes and patterns in European societies” (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2013c, 252).

At the same time, this “Social commitment” refers to the ecumenical context of the CPCE when it further declares, quoting the *Charta Oecumenica*: “Together with the other churches in Europe we confess: «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» (*Charta Oecumenica*)”<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2013c, 253. Cf. Conference of European Churches (CEC), Roman Catholic Council of European Bishops’ Conferences 2001, 7.

Before we move on to pointing out the significance of the *Charta Oecumenica* and the Conference of European Churches for the ecumenical context of the CPCE's approach to the topic of European integration, we will refer to another, relatively new ethical document of the CPCE. It fits into the model of a guidance text on current ethical issues. Previously, the CPCE published similar studies on the end and beginning of life. The document of interest to us deals with the COVID-19 pandemic and is entitled: "«Being church together in a pandemic» – Reflections from a Protestant Perspective" (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2021). The analysis contained in it refers to the concepts of liturgy, martyrdom, diakonia and koinonia. The topic of European integration appears as part of the reflection on the last of these under the headline: "European unification and solidarity in times of Covid-19." This reflection begins with a diagnosis of the breakdown of European solidarity in the face of the first shock of the pandemic. At the same time, it was noted that when this first shock passed, European cooperation returned. The pandemic is seen here as a stress test of European solidarity. It showed how deep the mutual dependencies are, exposed problems (the state of the health service, social inequalities and injustices), and showed the significance of the great achievement of the Schengen area (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2021, 26-27).

The CPCE analysis also indicates that "The future of the European unification process is up to social justice." The diagnosis of various efforts in this direction is accompanied in the document by the declaration: "As churches and Christians, we are committed to European cohesion and togetherness. In the CPCE, we stand especially for cooperation and community across borders. The reason is that our faith and our fellowship know no boundaries – peace, justice and caring for creation are concerns that do not end at national borders. Therefore, the churches – united in diversity – consider it pivotal to overcome borders and social differences that prove destructive in order to work together for the common good. We see the pandemic as an opportunity for more, instead of less, European integration and are willing to contribute to the future outlook of our common Europe, also by having our say in the planned conference on the future of Europe" (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2021, 27).

## **Ecumenical aspect**

The importance of ecumenical cooperation for the CPCE's involvement in the context of European integration can be seen in its cooperation with the Conference of European Churches (CEC). The Fifth General Assembly in Belfast (2001) already indicated cooperation with the CEC as an important structural factor in this involvement.<sup>5</sup> This was confirmed in the analyses of the CPCE's ecumenical relations contained in the document "The Shape and Shaping of Protestant Churches

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Heidtmann 2013, 41; Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft 2003, 386.

in a Changing Europe” adopted by the Sixth General Assembly in Budapest. Regarding the relationship with the CEC, we read: “By resolutions of their governing bodies, CEC and CPCE have declared that they will support and promote each other. At present this happens by way of joint consultations (on topics like «ecclesiology» and «accountability»), joint meetings of the respective governing bodies, agreements between members of staff, and by delegating a minister on behalf of the CPCE to the staff of the Church and Society Commission of the CEC since 1 September 2004. The further shape of relations between CPCE and CEC is of vital importance for the delineation of a recognizable profile of Protestant churches in Europe, for the development of the ecumenical movement in Europe and for the participation of the churches in the process of European integration” (Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) – Leuenberg Church Fellowship 2006, 13).

The aforementioned document also confirmed the importance of the Charta Oecumenica for the activities of the CPCE Churches in the European forum: “With their signature, however, the churches have expressed their conviction that visible unity and «common witness and service» in Europe are the concern of all Christian churches in Europe. They see as their most important tasks «the common proclamation of the Gospel, in both word and deed, for the salvation of all» and representing the «concerns and visions of the churches *vis-à-vis* the secular European institutions» in common social responsibility” (Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) – Leuenberg Church Fellowship 2006, 14). It was emphasized that the good experiences gathered in discussions on such matters as the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the European Constitution and the expansion of the European Union, the issues of EU anti-discrimination law or refugees and asylum show the necessity of cooperation of different Christian traditions towards European institutions (Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) – Leuenberg Church Fellowship 2006, 14). The significance of the Charta Oecumenica for the activities of the CPCE in the European forum is confirmed by the fact that it appears in the already mentioned “Social commitment of the Protestant churches in Europe” (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2013c, 252-253), as well as other statements of the CPCE on the issue of European integration.<sup>6</sup>

## **Witness and service**

In the context of witness and service, the CPCE reads not only its cooperation with the Church and Society Commission of the CEC, but also various shorter statements of its governing bodies in the context of European affairs. Some of them were collected in the 15th volume of the Leuenberg Documents series, entitled “Protestant in Europe,” summarizing activities up to 2015. Further interventions of this type are indicated in the summary of the implementation of Church

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2013a, Presidium of the CPCE 2013a; Presidium of the CPCE 2013b.

communion contained in the document of the Eighth General Assembly of the CPCE in Basel in 2018 entitled “Church Communion” (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2018). As a contribution to the European discussion, this document treats not only the statements of the CPCE referring directly to European issues, some of which will be presented below, but also the taking of a voice in the socio-ethical debates that are engaging public opinion in Europe. These include the CPCE’s voices on the end of life and its beginning.<sup>7</sup> The aforementioned document on the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic should also be included in this series of documents (cf. Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2021).

The CPCE’s involvement in the European debate is evident in its voice in matters that dominate the European debate. In 2001, the Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship issued a statement giving its opinion on the draft Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. It was adopted at a meeting in Belfast and it stated: “From this place where the task of reconciliation in Europe between humans and confessions is of particular significance, we welcome and expressly support the intention of the European Union to strengthen the protection of fundamental rights by means of a charter. Such a charter will contribute to making tangible a common basis of fundamental human rights” (Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship 2018, 397). It was also indicated that freedom of religion should be guaranteed not only individually but also collectively, which was accompanied by a proposal for an amendment to the relevant article of the draft (Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship 2013b, 397).

In 2002, the Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship presented the “Position Paper of the Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship concerning the Work of the EU Convention on the Future of Europe.” The document supports the readiness to enlarge the EU. It recalls the need to ensure equal opportunities in economic competition. It supports the change of the

<sup>7</sup> “In the course of the 1990s the pan-European dimension and the task of becoming visible at a European level became increasingly significant. The new political and social fields of action which opened up following the surmounting of the division of Europe made Europe and European questions a central theme. The European Protestant Assembly in Budapest (1992) called on the Protestant Churches in Europe to «fulfil together their responsibility for the future of Europe» and in so doing drew attention particularly to the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. The demand of the general assembly in Belfast (2001) to let «the voice of the Protestant Churches in Europe become more audible» set the agenda. This demand has from then on governed the agenda of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. Again and again in the past few years the CPCE has expressed an opinion on developments in Europe and its current problems, with, for instance, the statement from the praesidium *Meeting the Crisis* on the EU summit in 2011 in Brussels, the statement from the assembly in 2012 on the current situation in Europe with the acute problems caused by the crisis in the financial system, the economy and government debts, in 2014 with a statement on the European elections, in 2015 with a statement on the refugee crisis *Shelter and welcome refugees*, in 2017 with a statement on the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome. The CPCE Churches consciously participate in the socio-ethical questions which preoccupy Europe, for example with the guidance on end-of-life decisions and care for the dying *A time to live, and a time to die* (2011) or on questions of reproductive medicine «*Before I formed you in the womb...*» (2017)” (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2018, no. 30-31, cf. Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2011a; Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2017).

EU from an economic community to a community of values, stating at the same time: “we affirm the values of justice, reconciliation, responsibility and tolerance as spiritual and religious principles that are essential to the development of Europe” (Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship 2018a, 333). It speaks positively about the efforts to increase transparency in the EU and eliminate the democratic deficit, seeing in this its special task resulting from the Protestant understanding of involvement in the public sphere. It also emphasized that freedom is not complete autonomy and supported the reference to religious heritage or directly to God in the preamble to the European Constitution. The Leuenberg Church Fellowship also supports activities for the preservation of cultural diversity, and also advocates for the preservation of the autonomy of Churches and religious communities in legal systems. Finally, the importance of the statements of the Commission for Church and Society (CCS) of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) was highlighted (Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship 2013a, 332-335).

The commitment to the debate on the EU is also evident in the fact that, in the course of the discussions on the draft European Constitution, the CPCE published in 2005 “The EU Constitution from a Protestant Viewpoint. A Manual for Churches” (Presidium of CPCE 2013c). It briefly explains the history of the initiative for a European Constitution and explains those elements of the adopted draft that were of particular interest to the Churches. Among them was the assessment of the reference to “Religious inheritance” in the preamble (instead of the direct reference to God). Remembering the earlier voice in favour of the possibility of including such a reference in the light of the development of the debate, the CPCE took the following position, referring to the Protestant theological tradition and starting from the perspective of assessing the draft as a whole, and not just its preamble: “From a Protestant perspective, it is natural that a clear distinction be made of the tasks of the State and the Church. At the same time, it is also true that both areas must carry out their tasks in responsibility to God. The religious inheritance of Europe includes the realisation that every State authority stands in responsibility to God and humankind. This being so, the wording attained should not be underestimated. In principle, the Preamble of the Constitutional Treaty should not be considered isolated. It is a significant fact that in many other parts, especially those referring to fundamental values, the Constitutional Treaty is based on the values which are also fundamental from the Christian viewpoint” (Presidium of CPCE 2013c, 327). In addition, reference was made to fundamental values, the status of Churches and non-confessional organizations, economic and social policy, and common security and defence policies (Presidium of CPCE 2013c, 325-332). The whole ends with the following conclusion: “From a Protestant viewpoint, the Constitutional treaty is, despite some points of criticism, a considerably improved basis for the living together of people and States in Europe. Therefore, we support the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty” (Presidium of CPCE 2013c, 332).

The 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome also provided an opportunity to speak. The CPCE Presidium used it to express gratitude for the progress of integration and to present 5 good wishes for the future of Europe (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2013a). The first one, "Europe must continue to grow together," supports further progress in enlargement and good neighbourly relations with other neighbouring countries. The second one, "The European Union needs more democracy," points to the need to deepen the community and strengthen the possibilities of democratic participation. The third one, "The European Union needs more justice," calls for more decisive action in combating poverty and economic inequalities. The fourth one, "The European Union needs more openness," calls for a development and environmental policy that is sensitive to the fate of future generations, and also advocates for the EU's openness to the rest of the world and calls for increasing its contribution to the global growth of peace and justice. The fifth one, "The European Union needs a viable cultural identity," supports a dialogical approach to religious and cultural diversity, without abandoning the belief in the importance of the Christian faith in shaping Europe. The whole ends with a summary entitled "Unity in reconciled diversity. The contribution of the Protestant churches to the future of Europe." In reference to the Charta Oecumenica, the CPCE declares its commitment to the unity of the continent. At the same time, it reminds us that in this process we cannot ignore minorities or the socially excluded. As a possible point of criticism, it also indicates the excessive distance of institutions from ordinary citizens. As its contribution to thinking about the future of Europe, the CPCE offers its experience of working with the "Unity in reconciled diversity" model (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2013a, 322-324).

The year 2009 is also the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain (Presidium of the CPCE 2018a). This anniversary was also used by the Presidium of the CPCE to raise a voice rooted in the experience of the Churches in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. In this context, their possibility of joining the project of European integration was appreciated, while at the same time it was critically noted: "not all the promises of the new freedom in Europe have been fulfilled. In the past twenty years the process of the European Union has not only failed to abolish frontiers, but has also made new break lines visible" (Presidium of the CPCE 2018a, 318).

The CPCE's voice on European issues was also heard in the context of the economic crisis that occurred at the turn of the first two decades of the 21st century. In 2011, the CPCE Presidium took the floor (Presidium of CPCE 2018d), and in 2012, the subject became the focus of a statement adopted by the Seventh General Assembly of the CPCE in Florence (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2013b). These voices are critical of the mechanisms of the free market economy, which, if it weren't sufficiently controlled, it would lead to the crisis. They recall the importance of the European social model with its principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, and they also call for decisive action at the level of governments and the EU to diagnose the real causes of the crisis and take the necessary actions in

the area of the European economy. The importance of European solidarity, not only in the context of the ongoing economic crisis, was particularly emphasized in the Florence statement: “The major challenges of the 21st century – such as globalisation, climate change, demographic shifts, changes in the world economy, and political transformation in Europe’s neighbouring regions – call for a free and united Europe whose readiness to show solidarity does not end at the borders of individual states and, indeed, stretches beyond the continent of Europe” (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2013b, 314).

The CPCE also spoke out during the elections to the European Parliament. In 2009, a relevant statement was prepared, as well as a prayer proposal for European structures in the Presidium of the CPCE 2013b). In 2019 (CPCE Council 2019) and 2024 (Council of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe 2024), it was limited to statements. These voices were usually not overly extensive, but focused on current challenges for Europe, and also emphasized the importance of participating in elections for the processes of democratic participation in EU governance. They also include concern for the project of European integration as a peace project and an initiative bringing reconciliation.

### **The CPCE and European Integration – An Attempt at a Summary**

The above analysis of the CPCE’s statements at the levels of programmatic decisions, doctrinal discussions, ecumenical cooperation, and witness and service activities – the key areas of CPCE activity outlined in its founding document, the Leuenberg Agreement – has shown that references to Europe and the integration processes taking place within it have been strongly present on the CPCE’s agenda since at least the 1990s. The CPCE addresses these issues from a formal and institutional perspective. This includes programmatic decisions on coordinating activities to promote the voice of the Churches in the European debate through collaboration with various partners, including ecumenical ones. Among the latter, cooperation with the Conference of European Churches plays a prominent role. This ecumenical dimension of the CPCE’s European engagement, transcending the boundaries of Protestantism, is also evident in the Charta Oecumenica – one of the CEC’s most important achievements in collaboration with Roman Catholic partners – being a significant point of reference in terms of the content and values the CPCE seeks to promote in the European debate. From a formal perspective, it is also worth noting that reflection on European integration is present both in doctrinal discussions and in its documents analysing various general and specific ethical issues. In these documents, the question of Europe is not merely the context of the reflection, but its subject. It is also worth noting that the demand for a clear Protestant voice in the European debate is implemented by the CPCE in the area of witness and service activities by taking part in important European discussions (on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the EU Convention

on the Future of Europe, or the European Constitution), as well as on events important for integration (anniversaries of treaties or European elections).

When examining the substance of the CPCE's statement, it is clear that it offers a generally positive – though by no means uncritical – endorsement of European integration. The CPCE recognizes and affirms the concept of Europe as a unifying idea and the contribution of integration processes to European reconciliation, as well as the cultivation of diversity and peace. On the other hand, in its references to integration processes, the CPCE critically highlights the deficits of democracy and transparency in European structures, and consistently advocates for the openness of the integration process (this is facilitated by the organization's perspective which is more than just European, since the Latin American Church is also included in its ranks), as well as social justice and European solidarity. Greater integration is, from the perspective of the CPCE, a tool for preserving the latter two. At the same time, voices are present in the CPCE debate that the experience of deepening integration may raise fears that need to be addressed.

Reflecting on its role in European integration, the CPCE offers its experience in reconciliation, healing memories, and coping with diversity while maintaining unity. The CPCE also supports initiatives in the areas of dialogue, education, and fostering attitudes of tolerance, freedom in responsibility and solidarity. It sees this as the realization of ecumenically shared values that should contribute to the humanization of European processes. Among the values it emphasizes in European processes, which the CPCE seeks to promote through its involvement, are: human rights and fundamental rights (including the right to religious freedom), justice, just sharing of resources, openness to and care for migrants, and stewardship of all God's creation. This promotion of Christian values, attitudes and patterns within European societies is not aimed at re-evangelizing Europe through a repristination of Western Christendom. Rather, it seeks the inculturation of the Gospel –proclaiming it in forms that are appropriate to particular places and contexts.

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