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Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

CCME Activity report 2018

Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe – Commission des Églises auprès des Migrants en Europe – Kommission der Kirchen für Migranten in Europa

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CCME's MISSION AND MANDATE

„CCME is an ecumenical organisation that serves the churches in their commitment to promote the vision of an inclusive community through advocating for an adequate policy for migrants, refugees and minority groups at European and national level. In the fulfilment of this mandate it is responding to the message of the Bible which insists on the dignity of every human being and to the understanding of unity as devoid of any distinction between strangers and natives.“

(CCME Mission Statement)

CCME is the ecumenical agency on migration and integration, refugees and asylum, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. CCME members are Anglican, Orthodox, Protestant and Pentecostal Churches, Councils of Churches and diaconal agencies in presently 19 European countries. CCME cooperates with the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) in advocacy for migrants', refugees' and minority concerns and rights with European institutions, and in promoting integration and anti-discrimination.

CCME OBJECTIVES

In particular, the objectives of CCME are:

- to monitor European and national migration, refugee and anti-discrimination policy, to inform the churches about these policies;
- to support and serve the churches in their advocacy;
- to challenge the European institutions to act in accordance with human rights and international obligations;

- to strengthen on a global, European, national and regional level the cooperation of churches, NGOs and others in this field;
- to support and challenge churches to include migrants (churches, groups or individuals) in the communion of churches;
- to address fears in societies around migration and facilitate churches' initiatives on finding ways to peaceful living together.

Working instruments of CCME are conferences, seminars, studies, information and communication, working groups and thematic ad hoc meetings.



Context:

2018 – the year of a migration crisis - without migrants

The year 2018 was yet another year in which migration to Europe was one of the main political issues discussed, both nationally and Europe-wide, particularly in the EU. Considerable attention was devoted to discussions on how Europe's external borders could be better "protected" and how the returns of irregularly staying non-EU citizens can be made "more efficient". Once again, policy discussions seemed to suggest that the whole reality of displacement around the globe was playing out in Europe – while in reality the number of refugee arrivals once again dropped in Europe while increasing in other world regions.

The strong electoral performance of political forces strongly arguing against migrants, often propagating messages of hate, continued: elections in Italy led to the establishment of a coalition involving the extreme right and even in a country like Sweden, the extreme right made strong electoral gains. The electoral success of the extreme right in Italy led to a proponent of the extreme right becoming the country's Minister of Interior in summer 2018.

Subsequently, Italian harbours were closed for the reception of boat refugees and the actions against independent search and rescue activities continued in Italy and other Mediterranean countries. Since summer 2018, search and rescue ships which had saved drowning refugees and migrants have repeatedly encountered difficulties in the disembarkation – the result of a number of Mediterranean countries blatantly refusing to meet their international obligations.



The attacks on NGO led search and rescue were coupled with a general tendency towards the criminalisation of solidarity with undocumented migrants. In several countries, humanitarian helpers were exposed to or threatened with criminal sanctions.

On the EU policy level, efforts to reform the Common European Asylum System continued amid fundamentally different policy priorities between the different member states. While compromise seemed to be possible on a number of dossiers, it became clear that no agreement on the reform of the Dublin regulation was in sight. Attempts to “split” the so-called “asylum package” and go forward with adopting a number of selected proposals did not find a consensus towards the end of the year.

An area of easy agreement for member states were the attempts to externalise responsibility for refugee protection to third countries, using the EU-Turkey deal as a blueprint. While



the June EU Council had adopted conclusions supporting e.g.

disembarkation in North Africa, the implementation hit difficulties among them the unwillingness of North African states to cooperate. News from the Greek islands but also Libya confirmed the very problematic human rights implications of such moves.

CCME 2018

The CCME work in 2018 was guided by the CCME work programme 2017-2020 and its thematic priorities.

Safe passage

A continuing subject of deep concern for CCME was the continued series of shipwrecks of refugee boats in the Mediterranean. CCME once again called for the commemoration of those who have died on their way to Europe.

CCME together with members further continued its advocacy on safe passage to Europe. This once again included promoting resettlement, humanitarian visa, but also larger family reunification or hybrid forms such as the “humanitarian corridors” implemented by churches in several countries. At EU level, the ongoing negotiations on the EU resettlement framework were one central advocacy issue. CCME in particular underlined

the refugee protection aspect of resettlement and the need for resettlement to be a durable solution in discussions. This was important as several EU member states continued to highlight the migration control aspect of resettlement and suggested the granting of temporary status. CCME hosted a series of meetings among others with member states to influence negotiations. CCME provided expertise to churches in various countries considering advocating for humanitarian corridors or similar safe passage projects. It was actively involved in several activities exploring so-called "complementary pathways", among them different models of private sponsorship, for example by churches and Christian communities.



A major success of CCME advocacy was achieved in the area of humanitarian visa. While CCME has

already in previous years given input at various occasions on an EU humanitarian visa, the work of CCME and other Christian organisations helped to ensure the broad majority with which the European Parliament in December supported the report asking the European Commission to propose legislation for an EU humanitarian visa.

Europe and International Refugee Protection

The one focus in this area was CCME's efforts to advocate on the Common European Asylum System. CCME had in particular played a very crucial role in the exchange among non-governmental actors on the reform of the Dublin system and subsequently has been one of the organisations proactively working with the EU institutions, in particular the European Parliament. While a number of important advocacy points have been mentioned in the position of the European Parliament, the general negotiations between Council and Parliament gave little reason for hope and have run into a deadlock. Plans to increasingly externalise the responsibility for refugee protection to

third countries were vehemently publically criticised by CCME.

CCME also actively contributed to civil society advocacy on the international Compact on Refugees – in particular in relation to the positioning of EU member states. At the same time, CCME through the ACT Community of Practice contributed to the ecumenical advocacy efforts on an international level.

CCME continued the networking and advice among churches' refugee supporting organisations and networks across Europe.

A major event in 2018 was the 15th European asylum conference, co-organised by CCME and Diakonie Deutschland in Greece. Altogether some 150 participants in Chios and Athens examined the practical and political aspects related to the effects of the EU-Turkey deal. The final declaration of the conference strongly criticised the practice of keeping newly arrived refugees in deplorable conditions on the Greek islands and identified the responsibility of political actors, both nationally and EU wide.



European asylum conference on Chios

A very specific question of asylum was addressed by CCME in partnership with COMECE in May at a consultation looking at the implications of conversions to Christianity in the course of an asylum procedure. Experts from across Europe reported about the – often highly unsatisfactory – current situation and also gave insights into the processes of churches trying to improve the knowledge and practice of asylum authorities.

Addressing the dark side of migration and refugee protection, CCME continued its involvement in the TRACKS project, which addressed the needs of trafficked persons in the asylum procedure. The final project event in Brussels in January was a good occasion to present the concerns and best practices in this area.

Europe and International Migration

The work in the broader context of migration was very much influenced by attempts in policy and practice to show politicians being “tough on migration”. A central project in this area launched in 2018 is the recast of the EU return directive. Although labelled “directive of shame” by critics at the time of its adoption, the current directive had in connection with related jurisprudence an effective of guaranteeing minimum standards in the field of return. Citing the relatively low number of returns among those without residence status in the EU, European Commission President Juncker himself in his “State of the Union” speech failed to analyse the very important reasons why many of them cannot effectively return. He thus set the tone for the text of the draft of the return directive – a text which is full of punitive measures but doesn’t address any of the many obstacles why returns are often not carried out. CCME has joined forces with other actors to influence the European Parliament and the Council

to refuse this punitive, irrational and ideological approach.



Photo: Paul Jeffrey/Act Alliance

CCME continued its work on the consultative forum on fundamental rights of the EU border agency FRONTEX. On various levels, the consultative forum insisted on improving the human right impact of FRONTEX operations.

Like with the UN Compact on Refugees, CCME engaged on different levels with the process towards a UN Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Once again, coalition building on an EU level was coupled with contributing to UN related efforts through ACT International.

A number of events by member churches offering international perspectives on migration were supported by CCME, such as the Consultation on European Churches responding to migration, organized by

the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate in Bucharest on 17th-19th May or the parameters of international work on migration hosted by Diakonie Germany in April.

CCME was part of the preparation process and the actual CEC's General Assembly in Novi Sad in May/June. The assembly sub-theme of hospitality was the basis for broad reflection on issues around migration, which was highly appreciated by assembly participants

CCME (co)facilitated 3 different [workshops](#) (**Refugee protection – a task of the churches, Ecclesiology in times of migration, Interreligious work in the face of migration in Europe**) and also produced a booklet for the Assembly participants about migration and asylum in Europe, with good practices and a number of policy recommendations aiming at Safe-Passage for refugees and migrants.



(SOS Mediterranee)

Towards the end of the year, CCME facilitated the drafting and signing of a “Christmas Statement” of 30 church leaders from across Europe and across the different denominations. The statement which was co-sponsored by CEC underlined a couple of theological reflections on migration and displacement along with policy positions of European churches. It was on 4th December in a small ceremony handed over to the EP Vice-President McGuinness and translated into almost 20 languages.



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Upholding the Dignity of Persons, addressing discrimination

Activities in this area included the ongoing involvement in the EU Roma inclusion platform, to which CCME gave input.

As a follow up to the *refugeesreporting.eu* project, CCME continued its work on portrayal of refugees and migrants in the media and increasingly got involved in activities against hate speech. Partnerships with international organisations, but also professional associations of journalists were built. CCME gave input on various fora addressing hate speech, such as the WCC-Vatican meeting on racism in September in Rome or the WSCF Europe staff & officers meeting in May in Palermo.

The CEC summer school on human rights was once again a good forum for sharing CCME concerns in the two thematic areas of freedom of religion and populism. The specific issues and problems confronting both migrant Christians and non-Christian migrants in properly exercising their faith in Europe could be highlighted along

with grave concerns about populist forces directly and confrontationally targeting migrants in their public campaigns.

CCME continued its involvement with the European network against racism (ENAR), supporting ENAR efforts for broader coalition building in the area of anti-racism. A specific input was provided to the OSCE-ODIHR forum addressing discrimination of persons of African descent.

Uniting in Diversity

Work on Uniting in Diversity, which had traditionally been an area of uniting in diversity between different Christian churches, increasingly grew to include aspects of inter-religious collaboration.

On the more traditional work on “uniting in diversity”, CCME and some members continued the collaboration with the Community of Protestant Churches, looking at connections and relations of traditional European and migrant led churches. The CCME/CEC contribution towards the WCC consultation on the Vision of the Church based on the consultation held in Copenhagen was endorsed by both

CCME ExCom and CEC governing board and continued to inspire discussions and received a wide reception both among so-called “traditional/mainstream” churches as well as “migrant churches”.

Questions of inner-protestant exchange between traditional and migrant led churches were explored through cooperation with CPCE and CCME was once again invited onto the respective CPCE expert group.

An interesting new contact was developed in a number of areas with a more evangelical spectrum of churches and movements. CCME’s presence at the “Hope for Europe” conference in Tallinn was an important point of relating.

CCME continued its commitment to the German “Intercultural week” through its participation in the preparatory process.

CCME internal

2018 was a year of internal change for CCME. While a new ExCom had already convened in 2017, this body representing the CCME membership between General Assemblies, met

twice in 2018 – in Brussels in March and in London in September.

Both meetings were characterised by staff changes: the ExCom in March appointed Dr Torsten Moritz, previously CCME Executive Secretary, as new General Secretary as of 1st August. The outgoing General Secretary Ms Doris Peschke had announced that she would be leaving CCME after 19 years of faithful service. Her service to CCME and the ecumenical movement in Europe was commemorated by the ExCom at its meeting in September, with a reception in Brussels in June and at the CEC general assembly in May.



ExCom also appointed Ms Shari Brown as new Executive Secretary as of 1st October.

ExCom itself was able to welcome a new member, The Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani who took up the assignment as CEC representative on

the ExCom. Her predecessor Mr Andreas Henriksen Aarflot was thanked for his service to CCME at the CEC governing board meeting in November, he remains in the service of CCME as ExCom appointed him honorary legal adviser on the change of CCME's articles of associations currently underway.

The secretariat consists of three permanent staff: Ms Doris Peschke, General Secretary; Dr Torsten Moritz, Executive Secretary, later General Secretary, Shari Brown as Executive Secretary and Mr Emmanuel Kabalisa as office manager. Jean Pierre Habimana continued to serve as long term Global Mission Fellow while various interns supported CCME on a more short term basis

The financial situation has been almost balanced in 2018. The year was closed with a negative result of 5.790,46 EUR, even after using long-term reserves.

Funding and fundraising remain challenging, as major parts of income

are related to project funding. Fundraising and accounting/reporting takes up time, which cannot be used for networking or advocacy.

CCME will despite these challenges hopefully continue to be an instrument for European churches and agencies to network, express solidarity, love and hope and to influence European policy.

The deep fellowship of members, friends, volunteers and staff continued to be an indispensable resource and is together with the biblical leitmotiv of CCME's work expressed in the title of the assembly message "have no fear – but hope!"

Let us together work and pray that we can strengthen our *"commitment to promote the vision of an inclusive community through advocating for an adequate policy for migrants, refugees and minority groups at European and national level."*

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God." (Eph. 2:19)