

*Conference of European Churches
Church and Society Commission
Executive Committee*

**Meeting of the Working Group on Human Rights and Religious Freedom
Brussels, 21 to 23 February 2003**

1. Convention on the Future of Europe

A up-date document was given to the members for information and use in their respective context. Request for a feed-back from national level.

2. Vienna Conference Follow-up

This was the main focus of the meeting.

Decisions :

- a. The documentation will be sent to participants and put on the website.
- b. Peter Krömer will present 2 developments of the Conference to the plenary on Charta Oecumenica in Trondheim : the paper on Minimum Standards for Minority Churches and the Mediation Role of CEC.
- c. Paper on Minimum Standards : will be finalised for the Executive Committee with the recommendation to adopt it as a discussion paper to be put on CEC website and be used in the Trondheim plenary on the Charta Oecumenica. After Trondheim, a possible working group on human rights and religious freedom should take it up again.
- d. Mediation role of CEC : a paper will be finalised on what mediation could mean and involve, to serve as basis for the input in the plenary on Charta Oecumenica.
- e. There is a wish that a next working group takes up the issue of “sects” and their observation.

3. National Minorities

The document prepared by Urban Gibson will be finalised before end of March for submission to the Executive Committee on the 6 April. There will be an executive summary at the beginning, a guide how to read it and a preface with a theological dimension. The document is mainly designed for church people dealing with the issues without being very specialised.

4. European Social Charter

The paper prepared by Richard Fischer is to be finalised in view of a flyer to inform the churches about this instrument, including a collective complaint procedure, of the Council of Europe.

5. Conscientious objection

This document, to be sent to the churches with a covering letter, has been produced by the Council of Europe with a substantial input from CEC.

6. Feed-back on the work of the group

6.1 Achievements :

Were mentioned :

- conscientious objection
- the Vienna conference, in terms of content and outcome : it was important that CEC took up a burning issue in a concrete way, trying to achieve practical results
- good quality of personal and working relations, eg listening to each other
- good inputs for the EU Charter of fundamental rights, which have now developments in the work of the present convention on the Future of Europe

- important work done on national minorities
- Roma conference in Bratislava

6.2 Suggestions to make the work more effective :

- to improve communication among members of the group and to improve the feed-back to our own respective constituency
- to improve the work among members between 2 meetings. Problem : the overall workload of members
- to find lawyers dealing with fundamental rights – including social and economic rights – who have enough time to work between meetings
- to find 1 or 2 lawyers from Central and Eastern European countries
- to have meetings twice a year instead of every 9 months
- to use ad hoc groups (members from the WG) on specific issues
- to improve communication towards member churches on the work of the WG to increase contacts with outside networks (OSCE, WCRP, Amnesty...)
- to find better ways to deal with differences in the group.

6.3 Work to be finalised and to be planned for coming years

- document on national minorities
- follow-up of the Vienna conference
- globalisation and social rights
- freedom of religion and religious education in the EU
- church-state relations in the member states of the EU
- autonomy of churches and non-discrimination legislation
- religious freedom and human rights education and tolerance.

6.4 Expectations towards the CEC Assembly

That a mandate be given to CEC for mediation work and for work on majority and minority churches.

6.5 A working group should continue with following role :

- advisory body
- implementation group
- monitoring

Additional remarks :

- it is good that the mandate of the WG should be defined by the Church and Society Commission
- it is hoped that there will be interest in the member churches to participate in working groups
- it would be good that churches could give names of experts to whom CEC could turn, in addition of members of Working Groups
- member churches should disseminate and use CEC information in a broader way.

6.6 Profile of for members of a WG :

- people working with human rights on a practical level in their daily work and prepared to do home work during meetings
- people having good contacts to their church.

6.7 Readiness to continue if asked for :

Most of the members would be prepared to continue.

There was also a general expression of thankfulness for the good relationships and the atmosphere of friendship experienced in the group. Special thanks was also expressed to staff.

February 2003
Richard Fischer