



Position Paper of the Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship concerning the Work of the EU Convention on the Future of Europe

The Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship met in Strasbourg from 21 to 23 June. In this city, which hosts European Parliament and the Council of Europe, it dealt with the work of the Convention on the Future of Europe which began on 28 February. The Leuenberg Church Fellowship came into being in 1973 and has currently 103 member churches with some 50 million members in 32 European countries including all the EU member states and most candidate states. The expectations which these diverse countries and churches hold of the EU vary widely.

However, we declare jointly:

The Executive Committee welcomes the readiness of the European Union to extend beyond the existing borders. The commitment to common traditions and convictions led our churches in difficult times to seek and deepen fellowship across the Iron Curtain. This commitment, which is felt increasingly strongly among European nations, should also find expression in the political institutions of our continent.

The Executive Committee insistently recalls in this connection the obligation to support and provide equal opportunities in economic competition. The solidarity of rich churches towards the needy has always been a principle of our Church Fellowship. Within the EU, it has also been its key objective to harmonise the widely varying levels of development among the countries and regions from the point of view of the economic and social cohesion of the community. We ask the Convention to ensure that this guiding principle of solidarity and subsidiarity based on Christian values be fully implemented after the enlargement of the EU. Likewise, the principle of sustainability must be given even greater consideration. A prerequisite of the market economy is a binding structural framework that will deliver a social market economy in ecological responsibility.

The Executive Committee welcomes the readiness of the European Union to be transformed from an economic community into a community of values. As Protestant Christians, we are happy to contribute towards this process. Together with of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox fellow Christians, we affirm the values of justice, reconciliation, responsibility and tolerance as spiritual and religious principles that are essential to the development of Europe.

As Protestants we particularly welcome the aim of the European Union to improve the transparency of decision-making and to widen the possibilities of democratic involvement. The basic understandings of the Reformation include the insight that people should not rely on institutional mediation in their existential concerns, nor become dependent on them. The call for freedom of conscience and the doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers", undergird the democratic and liberal traditions of Europe. It remains the task of the EU to overcome the often-lamented "democratic deficit". The Protestant Churches are willing to contribute their strengths to the development of civil society. It is a feature of Protestant ethical tradition that

one should fulfil one's obligation to participate in public life and assume political and professional responsibility. This is the task of each church and of each individual Christian. For this reason it is desirable to pursue the possibility of Church involvement in the European institutions by means of a positive European law relating to religions, to guarantee charitable and diaconal service, and to respect religious holidays in the European Union.

Nevertheless, we point out that according to Protestant conviction, freedom does not mean absolute autonomy, but comes from listening to the message of justification by grace alone. "To be free means to recognise that freedom is received and accepted in order to share it with others." "Such freedom cannot remain by itself but turns to God, to whom it is indebted, and to human beings, so as to share the gift of freedom." (Leuenberg Documents 5 "The Christian Witness on Freedom", Frankfurt/Main 1999, p.150). A European Union that understands itself to be a community based on moral values must recognise that it is founded on assumptions which it cannot fulfil on its own. It follows that, in the Preamble to a future European Constitution, there should be an indication of the importance of religion for Europe. The rejection of absolute political power can be achieved by an express reference to God in the Preamble.

Our fellowship of 103 churches is marked by a great variety of confessions, constitutions and forms of piety. We have always regarded this variety as enrichment, the growing community not absolutely necessitating uniformity. We also recommend the European Union to maintain and promote the cultural variety of its member states. As Churches, our primary concern is that the particular legal regulations governing the relationship between Church and State, in contrast to a possible tendency to harmonisation and regularisation, should stay protected and the churches and religious communities still hold the freedom to self-determination in the administration of their own affairs, within the framework of the particular national constitutional laws.

We call attention to the various other statements of our member churches and other church alliances, especially the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (CCS) of the Conference of European Churches (KEK) in Brussels which is closely following the work of the Convention.

Strasbourg, 22 June 2002

The Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship:

Prof. Elisabeth Parmentier (Strasbourg): Executive President, President Rev. Thomas Wipf (Bern), Prof. Michael Beintker (Munster): Co-Presidents; Director Rev. Dr. Peter Bukowski (Wuppertal), Senior Church Official Dr. Michael Bünker (Vienna), Rev. Dr. Nigel Collinson (London), Senior Church Official Doris Damke (Bielefeld), Consistorial Official Piotr Gaš (Szczecin/Poland), President Dr. Friedrich Hauschildt (Hanover), General Secretary Ane Hjerrild (Copenhagen), Rev. Fleur Houston (Oxford), Bishop Dr. Mihály Márkus (Táta/Hungary), Prof. Willy Willems (Brussels); President Dr. Wilhelm Hüffmeier (Berlin): Director of the Secretariat

At present 103 Protestant churches in Europe and South America belong to the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (LCF). Lutheran, Reformed, United, Methodist and Hussite churches grant each other pulpit and table fellowship based on the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973. The five South-American member churches developed from earlier immigrant churches. Between the General Assemblies of the LCF, the 13-member Executive Committee makes decisions concerning the work of the LCF. The executive president (of the 3-member Presidium) is Prof. Elisabeth Parmentier, professor of practical theology in Strasbourg. Her deputies are Revd Thomas Wipf, president of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches in Bern and Prof. Michael Beintker, director of the

Seminary for Reformed Theology at the University in Münster. The other members of the Executive Committee are: Dr Peter Bukowski (Wuppertal), Moderator of the Reformed Federation, OKR Doris Damke (Bielefeld), Dr. Friedrich Hauschildt (Hanover), president of the Head Office of the United Lutheran Churches of Germany (VELKD), Bishop Dr. Mihály Márkus (Táta/Hungary), OKR Dr. Michael Bünker (Vienna), Revd Piotr Gaś (Szczecin/Poland), Prof. Willy Willems (Brussels), General Secretary Ane Hjerrild (Copenhagen), Revd Fleur Houston (Oxford) and Revd. Nigel Collinson (London). The Secretariat, which carries out the ongoing tasks under the direction of the Executive Committee, is housed in the Head Office of the Evangelist Church of the Union in Berlin, Jebensstr. 3, D-10623 Berlin. Its director is Dr. Wilhelm Hüffmeier, President of the EKV Head Office. OKR (senior church official) Udo Hahn (Lutheran Church Office, Hanover) is responsible for the public relations: Tel. 0511/62 61,226, fax 0511/62 61,511, hahn@velkd.de.