



Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa (GEKE)
Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)
Communion d'Eglises Protestantes en Europe (CEPE)

CPCE Council resolution on European refugee crisis

**Shelter and welcome refugees – strengthen a common EU-refugee policy –
To whom do I become a neighbour? (Luke 10, 36)**

It is with great concern that the Council of CPCE has observed the situation of refugees all over the world in the last months. Never since WWII has such a high number of people found themselves forced to flee their homes, their regions, their countries. International organizations are speaking about 60 million people worldwide. It seems that Europe is experiencing a time of profound political change in the world, for which “failing states” are one symptom. In Syria and Iraq it is especially the horrific and terrifying war which leads people to leave their own place. But even there most of the displaced persons seek shelter inside their own country. 4 million Syrians have entered neighbouring countries – Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey - living there under very difficult humanitarian conditions. This is also due to the fact that the international community has not provided the necessary financial support to the camps established there.

In the last weeks the refugee crisis hit Europe more dramatically than before. Pictures of boats with refugees drowning, refugees suffocating in lorries, and police violently driving away refugees from border areas, have left us profoundly shocked and sad. At the same time, a wave of solidarity and help has swept across Europe with – among others - many churches throughout the continent being active in welcoming refugees and supporting their arrival. Yet, violent incidents targeting refugees are also a reality in several countries in Europe.

The Council of CPCE reminds itself of the very specific and significant role of the stranger and the refugee in the Jewish and Christian traditions. Abraham invited and served three strangers, prepared a meal for them and he discovered, when they have left, that God himself has visited him through them (Genesis 18). Israel is reminded again and again to protect the stranger and the refugee because Israel was itself a slave under Egypt and released by God. To face a stranger, is to remind Israel of its own origins and God’s effort to protect and to lead to freedom.

When Jesus was asked “Who is my neighbour?” he answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan was a stranger himself in the environment at that time in Israel, and Jesus invited people to change their perspective and to ask: “To whom do I become a neighbour?”

The Council of CPCE is convinced that extending hospitality to refugees is a central Christian commandment and a mirror of God’s love to the human being. It should guide all actions of churches and policy at this very moment. This includes the reflection that such hospitality and the integration of refugees is an enormous challenge for receiving societies.

The Council appeals to the CPCE Member Churches to promote in their respective countries that the distribution of refugees in Europe takes place in a spirit of solidarity, fairness and mutuality. Only

together can this great task succeed. It is an opportunity for the Member Churches to be in a position where they can listen to the worries of those who feel pressed by the number of people coming in and challenged in their identity. Only the thorough apprehension of their concerns can oppose the simplifications of populism.

As a community of churches in Europe we are very much aware that the situation in the specific EU Member States and their societies is very different. But the Council of CPCE is pleading for a common European policy on the refugee crisis and a European responsibility which is based on European values as they are expressed in the Lisbon Treaty and the Fundamental Rights Charta of the EU. CPCE has argued on different levels in the last years that a united Europe is needed, because problems and challenges exist, which go beyond national competences and capacities. The refugee crisis is certainly one of these.

The European Council on 23 September 2015 took the decision to increase financial support to international organisations which are working in Syria and the neighbouring countries to shelter and welcome refugees; this has been a request from international as well as church organisations for years. This decision includes also the conviction that the solution lies in the end with the political situation in Syria and Iraq. This decision might become part of a good and constructive neighbourhood policy. With this crisis Europe discovers that it is a very close neighbour of the Middle East.

In line with this engagement the common EU migration and refugee policy should be strengthened. The Council of CPCE underlines the reflections on and demands for a more profound and common EU migration and refugee policy, as issued by other ecumenical organisations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) in the last weeks.

The Council of CPCE would like to highlight especially the request to establish regular, legal pathways for refugees to reach European territory without having to resort to smugglers. Such pathways could include more resettlement areas, humanitarian visas or lifting of visa requirements for persons from crisis regions, and more flexible rules for family reunification of refugees. In his State of the Union speech President Juncker has picked up this reasoning for "opening legal channels for migration". Furthermore it is important and necessary that the minimum standards for the reception of asylum applicants in the European states are upheld, how and wherever this reception is organised (in line with standards of the EU's reception conditions directive). In line with such a policy the EU can become not only a reliable neighbour for states, but also for people in need.

Council of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)

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