

## War – not in our name...

A few hours after the attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015 the French president declared that “France is at war” and two days later the French air force intensified its bombing of Syria.

At the same time the parliament voted for the imposition of a state of emergency throughout French territory for three months.

This bellicose rhetoric is foreign to our way of thinking:  
a reaction such as this does not promote peace,  
but rather makes us even less secure.

**This war is not being conducted in our name!**

Faced with these attacks, we are keener than ever to  
combat terrorism and its causes.  
Civil society should mobilise to defend and strengthen democracy  
through solidarity and justice.  
Security measures must remain within the framework of democracy.

The declarations about France being in a state of war serve  
to promote fear, paralysis, and feelings of powerlessness within civil society.  
On the other hand, everyday acts of solidarity and collective action  
reinforce social cohesion and enable people to overcome their fear.

It is evident that terrorism develops not only  
where there is a dictatorial or fundamentalist regime  
but also where there is social injustice and an unequal distribution of wealth.  
We need to take action to address the many diverse causes of terrorism.  
We combat violence by strengthening democracy,  
not by becoming bellicose and launching acts of war.

### Initial signatories :

Communauté de l'Arche  
Mouvement pour une Alternative Non-violente – MAN  
Mouvement International de la Réconciliation (MIR) branche française  
Génération médiateurs  
Réseaux Espérance  
Gardarem lo Larzac, le journal du Larzac solidaire  
Church and Peace  
Mouvement des Objecteurs de Croissance – MOC  
Gandhi International  
Union pacifiste de France – UPF  
Attac-France

# Editorial

Dear friends,

Last year's letter from the Sisters of Grandchamp began with a quote from Brother Richard of Taizé which says that we need "something new ... a future which isn't just a repetition of the past". This inevitably came to my mind during the past few weeks when several European parliaments decided to react to the murders in Paris with military action. It's a pity that they didn't have the courage to answer the French government's appeal for support with a resounding "Yes" (because mutual solidarity is one of the basic values of Europe) and yet at the same time to decide for themselves what form their friendly support should take. The means which have now been chosen will not help us all to find ways out of the spiral of social and cultural discrimination, oppression, violence and terrorism. That is why Church and Peace has added our signature to the statement "Not in our name" and thereby reiterated our "No" to military intervention and our "Yes" to a continued search for practical answers to the question, "So what then?"

There are several things which we can do and have already been doing for a long while. In this issue of the newsletter we present a few pertinent examples: facilitating encounters across national, ethnic, and religious borders (e.g. through the Church and Peace conference in Pristina and the journey through Serbia); welcoming refugees, listening with respect to their stories (see "spiritual food for thought"), and campaigning for action to mitigate the factors which drive people to leave their homes, instead of just building new fences in Europe; applying repeated pressure at the European level for reconciliation and living together in solidarity, and a recognition of differences as a source of enrichment (announcement about plans for a European ecumenical "Kirchentag"); and accepting our responsibility for the whole of creation, because we know that life is possible only if we live in harmony in and with God's creation (article about climate protection).

There are more answers and we each need to find and present them in our own social and political context. What unites us all is the hope that we don't have to live out our answer alone. We can walk with "our God" on the Way of love and acceptance, forgiveness and reconciliation, nonviolence and service – now. This is not a hope for a distant future in which everything will be different. During the coming days we will celebrate the festival of the Light which has come into the world, which accompanies us, and which we can pass on – now; it keeps on radiating – today. May it show us the Way in which something new can be created.

Happy Christmas and blessings for the New Year, 2016.

*Davorica Lovreković*

*Martin Schuler*

*Helga Amelung*

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# Building Bridges, so that we can live together in peace

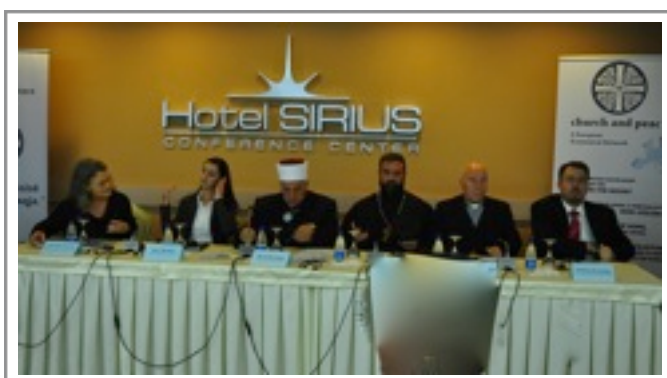
## Church and Peace Conference in Kosovo

Josef Freise

Up until the last minute there was some doubt as to whether the conference “Living Together at the Heart of Europe” could actually happen in Kosovo – or Kosova, as it is called in Albanian – because the situation in the capital, Pristina, had been tense for weeks. But in the end, 90 representatives of member organisations from thirteen European countries came to Pristina at the invitation of Church and Peace, the European network founded by the historic peace churches (Quakers, Mennonites, and the Church of the Brethren) along with Christians in the mainstream churches who espouse nonviolence. Interpreters provided interpretation in Albanian, Serbo-Croatian, English, French, and German.



“Don’t worry about the police officers who are guarding our centre. They’re here to protect us,” Pastor Artur of “The Fellowship of the Lord’s People”, the free church which had invited us, explained at the beginning of the conference. He saw the conference as a source of strength for the people in Kosovo who are working for peace and reconciliation. He told us about the young church, founded in 1985. During the war it was the only church in which Serbs, Albanians, and Roma could pray together. At Christmas in 1999, in the midst of the war, they – Albanian Christians – gave presents to Serbian children. There were horrible stories to tell about the war, but there were also stories of how they remained under God’s protection and became pioneers of forgiveness and reconciliation. It is now young people especially who find a place in the church’s projects. Some of them have a background of drug abuse and violence. Many of them find employment in the projects, so the future holds some prospect for them. When large groups of Kosovars left for Western Europe in January of this year looking for work, members of the congregation went and stood in the bus station holding placards. Their message was: “There is hope in Kosovo. Don’t leave!” But Artur Krasniqi knows: “A lot of people are discouraged, partly because of the corruption.” A young woman reported that she had finally found a job, “but only because I paid a lot of money to get it. Here you have to buy yourself a job.”



At the official reception, representatives of the Jewish synagogue, the Muslims, the Serbian-Orthodox and Catholic churches, and the Federation of Protestant Churches in Kosovo discussed their contributions to peacebuilding in the country. The president was also going to participate, but it turned out that she had other things to worry about: 400 meters away from where the reception was being held, politici-

ans from the nationalist opposition had thrown tear gas canisters in the parliament. "What are we supposed to do in this country?" is the understandable reaction of some of the young Kosovars at the conference.

There was a lot of respect for the Serbian Christians who were participating in the conference, because many Serbs are afraid to travel to Kosovo. A waiter in the restaurant was pleased: "At last I can hear Serbian voices again!" "Kosovars used to speak Albanian, Serbian, and Turkish," Artur Krasniqi explained, "We must learn to understand the other person's language again. We need emotional bridges joining us."

Before the conference a group of pilgrims spent a week travelling from Budapest via Belgrade to Pristina. They gave expression to the voices of the Serbians whom they had talked to, but who hadn't come to Pristina. "We have to listen to the stories of the other side and hear how they have suffered," explained Ernst von der Recke from the Laurentiuskonvent community, who, together with his wife Marie-Noëlle, had suggested the conference. "There are four aspects to the truth: to start with there are the incontrovertible facts. Then there is the personal truth which each person possesses with all that they have experienced. The third step is to measure this truth against the truth and experiences of the Other. Then it is possible to discover the whole truth with all its many facets. Only this truth makes it possible to live together in peace."

In various workshops reports were given of attempts to find the truth together. The "Believers for Peace" initiative, for example, brings Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians and Muslims together in Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.



In a keynote speech Leonardo Emberti Gialloreti from the Community of Sant'Egidio in Rome spoke about major challenges to peace. He pointed out that the people of Syria have now been suffering because of the war for longer than the duration of the First World War. If anyone says that Europe risks losing its Christian identity because of the large number of refugees, his answer would be: If we close the doors, we have already lost our Christian identity.

During the ecumenical worship, the chair of Church and Peace, Antje Heider-Rottwilm, talked about the war in Syria in the context of the verse from Isaiah which was the subtitle of the conference: "The fruit of righteousness will be peace."

(Isaiah 32:17) Before Isaiah describes this vision, he speaks about the violence of nature: "Beat your breasts in grief because the fertile fields and the vineyards have been destroyed." Scientists point out that between 2006 and 2011 Syria suffered the longest droughts and the greatest losses of harvests since the time of the earliest civilisation in the region. The collapse of Syrian agriculture due to climate change was a major cause of the conflict in the country and contributed to the rise of ISIS.

In the various regional ethnic and "religious" conflicts how can we engage both in non-violent action on the side of the oppressed and also in dialogue with the other side?



One thing was clear to the members of the Church and Peace network: This double challenge requires a deep spirituality. And the search for this spirituality was evident on an excursion: in silent prayer in a mosque, and in the harmony as we sang “Dona nobis pacem” in an Orthodox church and also in a Catholic church.

## Crossing Borders

### A journey of encounter through Serbia

Marie-Noëlle von der Recke

Very early on during the planning and preparation of the conference in Pristina, it was suggested that a group should travel through Serbia before the conference. The aim of the journey was not only to meet members and friends and to discover the beauty of the country and its people, but also to get to know the problems and the work of Christian organisations associated with Church and Peace. Nine people from Switzerland, France, Germany, and the Netherlands met in Belgrade on 29 Sep-



tember. This number grew at each stage as the group was enriched by Serbian members and friends. Seventeen people arrived in Pristina on 7 October.

Belonging to Church and Peace means **ignoring borders** to a certain extent – at any rate doing all one can to **overcome them**. The special thing about this journey was that we were going to travel from Budapest to Pristina through Serbia at a time when waves of refugees were traversing the country in the opposite direction.

We are kept in suspense until the last minute: As we are about to set off, the Serbian-Hungarian border has been closed for several days. But the situation is changing continuously as the time of our departure becomes imminent. There isn't a single refugee to be seen at the main station in Budapest. At the border only a high blue wall and NATO barbed wire give any indication of Hungary's new migration policy. The borders are no longer where we expect them to be. There has been a change in the route taken by the refugees.

The suspense continues until the end of our journey. On the border between Montenegro and Kosovo one of our group is almost turned back at customs control because she doesn't have the biometric passport which became obligatory two years ago. On the other hand, Serbian vehicles no longer have to exchange their Serbian number plates for Kosovan ones. We can relax.



We are continually confronted by the subject of **refugees**: The Lutheran congregation in Budapest, whom we met during the first evening of our journey, is very much involved in caring for homeless people and refugees. Along our route Tabita and EHO (Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation) in Novi Sad and Bread of Life in Belgrade are helping the people who want to go north. Our discussions on the topic correct the impression prevalent in the West that the churches aren't doing enough during this crisis.

It is impossible to relate everything that we heard during our visits to projects and communities in Sombor, Novi Sad, Belgrade, Soko Grad, Gjakova/Đakovica, and Dečan/Dečani. All the people whom we meet have one thing in common: They are all **people of goodwill**. Every one of them has a story which deserves to be told. They have worked to accommodate thousands of refugees in 1991, 1995, and 1999. Many of them have been refugees themselves. Today they devote their lives to helping the weakest people: children, vulnerable young people, Roma families, elderly people, people who are handicapped, migrants, widows. We are very impressed by the projects, the people who work in them, and the faith which sustains them. They give us a lot to think about when we get back home. What new partnerships should we establish? And how should we build on existing partnerships?



Besides those engaged in practical action at the margins of society there are also groups which address the problems of the region at the level of **thought and reflection**: The Ecumenical Women's Forum, the Ecumenical School, both of which are projects run by EHO, the protestant Faculty of Theology in Novi Sad, the "Institute for Reflection on Politics and Religion" and the "Open School" in Belgrade are all **places of encounter, education and dialogue**. A new generation is tackling difficult issues, such as the relationship between **nationalism and religion**, and the **search for truth** about the events which have torn the region apart. This means undertaking the painstaking task of investigation in the face of considerable opposition. And it means trying to satisfy the deep desire to do whatever is necessary to make it possible to move forward from a new starting point. But human subjectivity is stubborn. In Kosovo the memory of the massacre of Albanians in April 1999 is kept alive. And in Serbia the expulsions and the destruction of more than 100 Orthodox churches in 2004 are remembered. It seems that uncovering the truth can only bring healing when everyone is able to mourn all those who have died – not only those of one's own ethnic group, and to denounce all violence – not only the violence of the others.

A young Orthodox theology student takes us to visit the synagogue, the old mosque, and the churches in Belgrade. We are impressed by his ecumenical sensitivity. He is old enough to have conscious memories of the bombing of Belgrade, but young enough and courageous enough to call into question deadening structures within his own tradition. There is hope for renewal here and it needs supporting. We promise to stay in touch.

We have a full itinerary and there is **quiet time** at irregular intervals. Nevertheless we manage to come together several times to sing, to pray, to listen to the scriptures, and to share our impressions. In Soko Grad, a remote Orthodox conference centre, we walk up to a high cross which was donated by a German family as a sign of reconciliation after 1999. Along the way there are little chapels with boards displaying the Ten Commandments. We walk in silence, but stop to read every word aloud before we reach the cross. From there we look out over a beautiful and peaceful mountain landscape. Bosnia lies opposite. The horrors of Srebrenica took place behind one of the mountains close to us. Twenty years have passed since then. The reality which accompanies us throughout our journey is multifaceted.

Not all the members and friends of Church and Peace in Serbia were able or wanted to take part in this journey. Those who were prepared to travel with us to Kosovo were delighted by the friendly welcome which they received in Gjakova/Đakovica, Prizren/Prizreni and Pristina. **The fellowship across national and confessional borders** was tangible, especially during the last stage of our journey in Gjakova/Đakovica and in the Orthodox monastery of Decan/Decani. It became a practical reality when Branka from Novi Sad suggested making a collection to start a fund for pastor Jeton Sokoli's plan to build a new church.

Church and Peace invites the churches to become peace churches. The experience of this journey showed the participants what such churches are made of.





# "Listening Like a Disciple"

Sebastian Berghaus

Are you a good listener? We value good listening skills very highly. We like to confide in good listeners. We feel understood, valued, accepted, relieved. If you are a good listener, you have time for me, ask questions, and will keep things to yourself.

But the act of listening can also give the listener power, and we need to be on our guard against this. There may be a hierarchy between the listener and the person being listened to: a person needs help and another provides it; or one person is receiving and the other is giving. Or one's sense of propriety or moral sensibilities may be upset. Do I then have sufficient understanding for the situation or circumstances which are being shared with me? Or a person and their fate may touch me deeply and I feel sympathy for them because I like them or because I've had a similar experience myself. And I may even take on the person's pain and suffer with them without distinguishing between what is mine and what is theirs, without respecting the fact that it is their own unique and personal story which they are sharing with me. I also need to be on my guard against the power which comes with listening when the person and their story is and remains alien to me because I don't understand them and disapprove of them.

For this and many other reasons, when we are listening we apply filters to the stories we are told. The stories are coloured by these filters and this influences our perception and judgements. But we can't listen without filtering. So it is worth subjecting our filters to a sober and objective analysis. This enables us to see through them now and again. "Listen like a disciple" is how the Bible puts it: Listen like a person to whom God has given talents and a mission. This reminds us of a prophet, a refugee, a person who has been subject to persecution, a person who stands together with his own people – foreigners in a foreign land. "God's suffering servant" is the title or heading given to the following section of the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 50:4–6):

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher and skill to console the weary with a word in the morning; he sharpened my hearing that I might listen like one who is taught. The Lord God opened my ears and I did not disobey or turn back in defiance. I offered my back to the lash, and let my beard be plucked from my chin, I did not hide my face from spitting and insult;

War and destruction had driven the prophet, along with a lot of other people, to far away Babylon where he ended up being persecuted and tortured. He had evidently begun to prophesy to his people the end of their oppression and to point out to those in power that there were limits to their power. This had consequences. Persecuted, beaten up, abused, and spat upon: How can one then speak to those who are weary at the right moment? By listening – not by seeing.

Because what there is to see, is horrific. None of us can take courage from what we see. It drives people to despair, carried away by impotence and anger: boats in the Mediterranean, drowning refugees, overcrowded camps, barbed wire along the external borders of Europe, refugee accommodation sent up in flames, politicians prophesying collapse.

These images, as record shots of this moment in time, have a pervasive influence; we are horrified by the suffering, the helplessness, the guilt and shame which lie behind the pictures. And these images then threaten to cover up the other pictures which are



also there and which are beautiful and strong: the people who work to support refugees by providing shelter, giving them food and clothing, and caring for them; the people who are in positions of responsibility, politicians at all levels, who work day and night, organising, and mobilising all the resources they can find; emergency services, social workers, doctors, service providers, teachers, officials, private companies, institutions which provide health care and help with integration and employment, take care of registration, facilitate contact with home countries, process applications. And there is also the image, seen around the world, of Germany and the Germans, until recently scornfully associated with the swastika and a small moustache, now open and eager to help, in spite of all the ridicule ("Hippy Germany") and all the right-wing slogans.

We manage all these images and allow them to influence us. They then acquire power over us and manage us. People are free to use these images in any way they like and sometimes we are amazed by the ways in which the pictures are used and sometimes misused.

Listening to the stories behind them gets us further. Stories include a beginning and origins, developments and what fostered or hindered them, aims and intentions, disappointments and successes, fortune and misfortune. All this needs to be taken in from a respectful distance, and honoured and affirmed.

Any analysis and evaluation is done – if at all – only after we've heard everything, when we've finished listening. In crisis intervention there is a method of keeping a check on ourselves which is strongly recommended: Only when I can relate someone's story back to them accurately so that they look at me and say, "Yes, that's right. That's my story." – only then have I finished listening.

Only then is it my turn to speak. We take Isaiah as an example and speak with a tongue given to us by God, such as disciples have. This is how we know how to speak to the weary at the right moment: He opens up my ears each morning so that I can listen like a disciple listens.

The filter which we use when listening to the stories around us is the love of God which meets us in Jesus Christ and which analyses and evaluates our own stories, accepts, understands, puts things right, regards them as being unique and valuable, and brings them to a good end.

This filter enables us to accept each other and to welcome people who are in need with respect for their human dignity. It doesn't relieve us of responsibility for using our intelligence: asylum and immigration, the distribution of refugees within Germany and Europe, the factors which drive people to flee, their countries of origin, legal processes and accommodation, integration and the job market, honourable and less honourable motives for fleeing: all these matters can and have to be looked at and considered carefully and tackled with such great speed and intensity that one could easily lose sight of the whole picture and any sense of orientation. But there are limits to the power of "listening" which leaves a person's story and therefore the person themselves at the mercy of our interpretation and evaluation. We do not refuse a person food and shelter, respect and dignity simply because they may not be permitted to stay indefinitely.

Taken from Decan Berghaus' sermon  
given in the Stadtkirche in Tuttlingen on 13 September 2015

## Now the work must start in earnest

### The Paris climate change agreement

Davorka Lovreković

“The Bible teaches the wholeness of creation and calls human beings to take care of the garden of Eden (Gen 2:15). The God of the Bible is a God of justice who protects, loves and cares for the most vulnerable among his creatures. The present world development model is threatening the lives and livelihoods of many, especially among the world's poorest people, and destroying biodiversity. The ecumenical vision is to overcome this model based on over-consumption and greed.” (1)

This is the reason which the World Council of Churches gives for taking action to protect creation and work for climate justice. And this is why churches and their members are actively involved in discussion and action for climate protection. Together with representatives of other faiths and civil society actors, they especially made their voices heard during the climate negotiations in Paris.

The Paris agreement – reached in spite of widespread fear beforehand that the negotiations would fail – envisages that:

Global warming should be limited to less than two degrees above pre-industrial levels. However, the state signatories to the agreement should make serious efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees.

In addition, greenhouse gas emissions should peak “as soon as possible”, with the aim of reducing net total greenhouse gas emissions to zero during the second half of this century. In practice this means that greenhouse gas emissions should be limited to the amount that can be absorbed by the environment (e.g. through reforestation, etc.).

According to researchers these limits mean that: given the goal of a two degree limit, the burning of coal, oil, and gas must stop completely between 2050 and 2070. No more coal-fired power stations can be built in future, because they would continue over several decades to emit CO<sub>2</sub> which would then persist in the atmosphere for a very long time.

The climate protection plans which were submitted to the Paris climate conference by about 190 countries are not enough to limit global warming to less than two degrees. Researchers have calculated that the commitments which countries have put on the table would permit global warming of three degrees. The countries which are parties to the agreement have therefore agreed to improve their targets at five-yearly intervals. 2020 will be the first time when new targets will be set for the period up until 2030. Existing plans for the period to 2030, such as those submitted by the EU, should be upgraded as far as possible.

Many researchers and climate campaigners believe, however, that the revision of targets at this rate will be far too slow to meet the two degree limit.

All states should record and publish details of climate protection measures and data on greenhouse gas emissions. However, this stipulation is to be interpreted “flexibly” where developing countries and emerging economies are concerned.

Between 2020 and 2050 industrial countries should contribute 100 billion dollars (91 billion euro) annually for developing countries. Private investments can be included in this figure, if they are supported financially by government. A new and higher target is to be set for the years following 2050. Other countries will be “encouraged” to contribute “voluntarily” to the funding. This applies especially to emerging economies such as China and to oil producing countries. Many climate campaigners regard these measures as too weak.

In the agreement the states which are party to it have recognised that rich countries have a duty to help poor countries overcome the problems arising from climate change, e.g. by means of a system of insurance, although this would still need to be set up. There should be help especially for climate refugees. However, the USA insisted on the inclusion of a passage which closes the door on claims for compensation arising out of this commitment to provide help.

The agreement is legally binding. But no penalties were agreed for failure to meet commitments. On the other hand, poor countries are to be given financial incentives to play their part.

The agreement will come into force when at least 55 percent of the states which are collectively responsible for at least 55 percent of greenhouse gas emissions have officially ratified it. Observers believe that this could happen soon. Important sections concerning the financial aspects of the agreement were not included in the text of the agreement, so that it can be assumed that national parliaments will be able to ratify the measures quickly. It is therefore hoped that the USA, a major emitter of greenhouse gases, will be able to reach decisions quickly and set to work on meeting the targets.

Before the negotiations, Church and Peace, at its Annual General Meeting in Pristina in October, joined in calling for a comprehensive climate protection agreement and signed the statement of leading representatives of various churches, institutions and religions (2). Climate change not only makes itself felt through natural disasters. It also aggravates existing conflicts and may even be a source of conflict. The conflict in Syria is an example of this. A long period of drought, poor harvests, and a lowering of the water table preceded the peaceful protests which then turned into armed conflict. In a conflict situation it is even more difficult for people to tackle the severe problems caused by climate change. (3)

The agreement is not perfect and would probably never have been reached without a lot of hard work over a number of years by environmental organisations and without a lot of pressure from civil society. If the climate protection goals are to be reached, huge efforts must now be made to put measures into effect quickly, so that the agreement does not become just a promise on paper. Many churches and faith communities have pledged their support for putting the agreement into effect.

At the end of the conference in Paris one organisation used the title “The End of the Beginning”: Now the work must really start in earnest.

(1) World Council of Churches, statement on website (home/what we do/care for creation and climate justice):  
<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change>

(2) See: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/diakonia/climate-change/statement-from-religious-leaders-for-the-upcoming-cop21>

(3) Church and Peace press release, 27 October 2015:  
[http://www.church-and-peace.org/fileadmin/downloads/Pressemitteilungen/CaP\\_PM\\_COP21-E.pdf](http://www.church-and-peace.org/fileadmin/downloads/Pressemitteilungen/CaP_PM_COP21-E.pdf)

## European “Kirchentag”

How can Christians work towards a common European self-understanding? How can they share their spirituality and celebrate their creativity? How can they get together to talk about the world’s crises and challenges, and find solutions?



More than sixty people from various confessions and from twenty European countries met in Bad Boll, 1–3 June 2015, shortly before the Kirchentag (German protestant convention) in Stuttgart. People have already been thinking for a long time about the possibility of a European “Kirchentag”. The purpose of the conference, to which Church and Peace was also invited, was to discuss the idea and how it might be realised. The outcome of the conference included an initial project outline and an appeal for people to get involved in further consultations. The basis for action to promote Europe as a whole – and for the planned event in particular – is the “Charta Oecumenica”.

An ecumenical European coordinating team with members from France, England, Romania, Greece, Finland, Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland took on responsibility for the planning and organisation of a further meeting in 2016, at which it will be decided whether or not to go ahead with this project.

The agreed “Roadmap for a European Ecumenical Convention – ECC” is available from our international office: [gensekr@church-and-peace.org](mailto:gensekr@church-and-peace.org)

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## Church and Peace

European ecumenical network of peace churches, and peace church-oriented congregations, communities and service agencies.



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in USA:

Send US Dollar check to the order of 'Ivester Church of the Brethren (designation: Church and Peace fund)', 25056 'E' Avenue, Grundy Center, Iowa 50638–8761, USA (tax deductible)