

**Church and Peace 70th Anniversary Celebration**  
**18 May 2019, Berlin**  
**Address**  
**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES**

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Matthew 5:9

Ladies and Gentlemen, Brothers and Sisters,

I am bringing greetings from the Conference of European Churches.

We are the ecclesial and ecumenical fellowship that unites some 114 churches from Orthodox, Protestant and Anglican traditions across Europe for dialogue, advocacy and joint action. Together we strengthen our common witness, act in service to Europe and the world, promote peace and work for the unity of the Church. The Conference of European Churches maintains relationships with a number of Organisations in Partnership, Church and Peace is one of them. This collaboration helps us respond to a broader range of social and theological issues, including diaconia, peace, migration, refugees. It is evident that fruitful collaboration with Church and Peace has been focusing on peace.

May I warmly thank Church and Peace for giving me the privilege of addressing you all on this notable occasion of the 70th anniversary of Church and Peace. It is significant bringing greetings to an ecumenical network with a record of 70 years actively promoting peace and non-violence in Europe and being such a valuable partner organisation to the Conference of European Churches.

Whereas 2019 marks the 70th anniversary of Church and Peace it also marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Conference of European Churches, which we shall celebrate later this year with the active involvement of Church and Peace. The Conference of European Churches emerged 1959 from a fragmented and divided Europe following the Second World War. At that time there was a real need to overcome political divisions, and work for healing and peace.

Today, the continent experiences pain from unhealed wounds and new divisions. We also recall our place in the broader world and the global challenges that we face. European churches have to look to their roots and history, and again act as an instrument of peace and understanding. The current multi-annual focus of the Conference of European Churches, is on three aims: promoting peace, justice and reconciliation in Europe; deepening church communion and ecumenical fellowship; and raising the Churches' voice in Europe and towards the European institutions.

I am particularly happy to be present in today's anniversary celebrations of Church and Peace because as the moderator for peacebuilding and reconciliation of the Conference of European Churches I have worked very closely with Church and Peace, who is a member of the Thematic Reference Group on peacebuilding and reconciliation of the Conference of European Churches. I have been relying on your expertise, motivation but most of all perseverance to serve peace and nonviolence in Europe. With the support of Church and Peace the Conference of European Churches urged, inter alia, strong support for the European Parliament resolutions on arms export and arms embargo.

The Conference of European Churches is a servant of peace. It opposes in particular European policies that could lead to transforming the European Union into a military alliance. The European

Union as a peace project must strengthen civilian conflict prevention and resolution over and above the militarisation of its budgets and institutions. As churches living out gospel values, we urged the European Union to gather all human and financial capacities for peacebuilding as the basis for shared security. The European project, in its various manifestations, stands as an example of what can be done through non-military means to build a peaceful, stable and prosperous Europe. The Conference of European Churches has asked member churches to engage with national governments in a critical discussion of their role in the future development of European defense policies.

To this end, Church and Peace has been instrumental within the Conference of European Churches to call on the European institutions to prioritise peacebuilding and reconciliation instead of the militarisation of the European Union. Together we have called on the European Union to avoid opening way for the militarisation of its multi-annual financial framework 2021-2027 and structures and to refrain from dedicating EU funds for defense research and development. To date, our calls for reviewing the planned EU regulation of financial support for the European arms industry and the future of European defense have fallen on deaf ears.

2019 also marks the 100th anniversary of the Paris Peace Conference, following the First World War. Given the ongoing role of promoting reconciliation and building peace, the Conference of European Churches will be holding a significant international peace conference in September 2019 in Paris, with a twin focus on the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and the current global and European situation. Church and Peace has been involved in the design of the peace conference.

The 2019 Peace Conference will reflect on the past as well as provide greater understanding for the context in which we live today. The Paris Peace Conference 1919 has left many legacies. Much of its promise was unfulfilled. Its most destructive legacy has been the Middle East region, and peace in today's world may largely depend on peace in the Middle East. In so far as it has a religious dimension, it involves the Abrahamic faiths, between which there is a growing politically and media driven tension. The 1919 Paris Peace Conference has therefore bequeathed European politics and churches with multiple and complex challenges and peace agendas.

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself...and has given us the ministry of reconciliation..." 2 Corinthians 5:19. In the vision of St Paul reconciliation and peacebuilding are a participation in God's mission in and for the world. Jesus declared the peacemakers the children of God, a Jewish way of describing the most God-like people. The churches, therefore, have a witness to and practice of peace. Churches are also part of civil society and therefore reconciliation and peace are not private and individualistic pursuits. The witness to and practice of peace is public and peace witness is public theology in action. Reconciliation for peace as desired and as experienced in the different churches of the Conference of European Churches can become a central leitmotif for the Conference of European Churches in its wider engagement in society.

The Conference of European Churches with its member churches, the National Councils of Churches and Organisations in Partnership, such as Church and Peace will pursue that a public Church accepts its share of responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of its adherents and for the common good and wellbeing of society. It has a critical voice when necessary, envisioning an alternative world when required, and it articulates a hope-filled voice. It is local, European and global in its engagement.

As a concrete expression of this, the Peace Task Force which is currently being developed is to give active witness to God's ministry of reconciliation. As a Peace Task Force their action will essentially be

as mediators of peace in the wider European and local contexts. This mediation work will be through the Conference of European Churches and its member churches. The task will be threefold: responding to situations of conflict; peacemaking; peacebuilding. In an increasingly complex and fragile world in which conflict can erupt quite easily, churches are called to pool their resources and work for a world in which there is peace and reconciliation for justice. Such an initiative will enable healing of memories and the building of right relationships thus contributing to God's Peace. Reconciliation and Justice for Peace initiatives will become central to the churches self-understanding and participation in God's mission in and for the world.

The ministry of reconciliation according to St. Paul is the task of all of God's people. Yet within this there is need for practitioners equipped with the knowledge and skills for engaging and responding appropriately to particular situations of conflict and for being instruments of peace.

We will continue to build bridges of peace and hospitality in our communities, and remain committed to strengthening relationships among churches in Europe. Our common responsibility for the future of Europe compels us toward solidarity and friendship even in the midst of uncertain and challenging political circumstances.

The Conference of European Churches congratulates Church and Peace for their commitment and active participation in peacebuilding and wishes you all the success and blessings in our joint efforts towards peace and non-violence over the next 70 years.

Catherine Tsavdaridou, Ecumenical Patriarchate

Conference of European Churches, [www.ceceurope.org](http://www.ceceurope.org)