

## European elections – a way of creating unity in diversity

From 23 to 26 May 2019, elections will be held for the European Parliament in all the member states of the European Union. The EU's citizens have the opportunity to determine the composition of the European Parliament by taking part in such elections every five years. The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe calls upon people to participate in these elections and play an active role in shaping the European living environment according to the established path towards reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.

### *Europe – a pathway to reconciliation*

During its 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, held in Basle, Switzerland, in September 2018, the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe commemorated the end of the First World War. It also recalled the gift of reconciliation that the people of Europe have enjoyed since 1945, as manifested politically in the Council of Europe and the European Union, after devastating wars and nationalistic aberrations had led Europe to the brink of ruin. The end of the Cold War dismantled the brutal dividing line running through Europe and allowed Eastern Europeans to determine their own fate in free elections. "Protestant Churches in Europe must sustain the longing for peace and reconciliation in the different post-conflict societies, also under the current economic, social and political circumstances, wherever they are perceived as unjust. At the same time, they are aware that reconciliation is not an ideal condition or a singular act, but rather a process that needs to be initiated or maintained. Reconciliation requires willing participants and the kind of structural measures that serve this aim. This explains why the Protestant Churches in Europe welcomed the process of European integration as an act of peace and reconciliation."<sup>1</sup>

### *Europe is where we rise to our challenges*

The representatives elected to the European Parliament will bear a huge responsibility, as the European project itself is embroiled in a multifaceted crisis, including the United Kingdom's departure from the EU. The increase in Euroscepticism and anti-European voices, and even a return to nationalistic ideals, can be seen in many European societies.

At the same time, Europe faces challenges that are immense, highly evident and quite obviously not solvable by individual nations alone – climate change and sustaining creation; humane policies towards refugees and migrants; social and economic divisions in Europe, which among other things lead to thousands of people searching for work and a future in a different member state while leaving their families and dependants behind; the profound change in our societies caused by the use of new technologies such as digitalisation, automation, artificial intelligence, etc.; and, finally, also the shifts in political forces outside Europe.

Those charged with steering European politics in the future will have to tackle these challenges objectively and with special expertise. A careful analysis of economic, political and social processes is fundamental for making the appropriate decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> Statement issued by the 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the CPCE entitled "Together for Europe: The centenary of the end of the First World War – remembering together for the sake of the future", Basle, September 2018

### *Europe is a place for diversity*

Most of the churches in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe are minority churches living the experience of diaspora.<sup>2</sup> They are subject to the supposed majority opinions and beliefs. To unfold their own faith, they need a space that allows for difference and diversity. Thus, with regard to the political sphere, it is precisely democracy and democratic elections that ensure minorities are given a voice and a seat at the table in political discourse and decision-making. The elections to the European Parliament ensure that diversity can flourish further in Europe and has a voice, while helping to shape unity and reconciliation at the same time.

### *Europe is a habitat that we want to help shape*

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe affirms the fundamental importance of democracy and the rule of law. States founded as parliamentary and constitutional democracies “correspond with the dignity, freedom and equality of all people awarded by God’s creation. By dividing, limiting and checking the sources of power, they take account of human fallibility and sin. Institutions based on the rule of law protect and enable the freedom of each and every individual and the coexistence of all.”<sup>3</sup>

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe encourages people to make use of their right to vote and thus influence the path Europe takes. There are many opportunities to play an active role in shaping Europe, but this forthcoming one in particular determines the composition of the European Parliament for the next five years.



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

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<sup>2</sup> See the study document passed at the 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the CPCE entitled “Theology of Diaspora”.

<sup>3</sup> Statement issued by the 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the CPCE entitled “Together for Europe: The centenary of the end of the First World War – remembering together for the sake of the future”, Basle, September 2018