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MEETING OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

1993

M i n u t e s

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of the

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10 to 17 March 1993
Iserlohn, Germany

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APPENDIX B.1

MEETING OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE
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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

More precisely a plea for ecumenical defiance!

by Alexandros Papaderos
President of the Interim Executive Committee of CEC

1. It is a great honour and a genuine joy for me to be able to welcome you all to this meeting of the new Central Committee of the Conference of European Churches. We have all met together in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to whom honour and thanksgiving are due for the great gift of our meeting and fellowship together and with the brothers and sisters in this House and in this country. And we are happy that so many churches and ecumenical organizations have accepted our invitation and are enriching our meeting with their representatives.
2. We were very grateful to receive through Praeses Hans-Martin Linnemann, a member of our Central Committee, the kind invitation to hold our meeting here in Iserlohn as guests of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia. For this we should like to thank you, our worthy and dear brother Linnemann, most cordially, and to congratulate you on your church's confirming you in the office of Praeses for a further period. Among other things we should also like to interpret your re-election as good news for us and for CEC, for we know it is not everywhere that recognition is granted to people who commit themselves as much as you do to the ecumenical movement. But we also are aware of the many kinds of ecumenical involvement on the part both of the Westphalian Church and of the Evangelical church in Germany generally. We should like also to take this opportunity to express once again our thanks to CEC. Our sincere thanks are also due to all our brothers and sisters who have helped in preparing this meeting and given us such a warm welcome.
3. As the director of an Academy I am also particularly glad that our meeting is taking place in one with which I myself have already had links since our late and good friend Fritz-Herrmann Keienburg was its head. It is well-known that CEC places a particularly high value on its cooperation with the Ecumenical Association of Academies and Lay Centres in Europe, and with individual institutions. And we are all glad to be in an Academy such as this which for us is a lively and encouraging example of creative Christian dialogue. Cordial thanks to you, my dear colleague, Professor Günter Ebbrecht, and to your colleagues for all the good things you have already given us and still have in mind to give us!

4. While we are together we shall always have in our minds those who before us or with us have followed the path of CEC, which has not always been strewn with roses and palm-leaves. Not simply because it is proper to do so but from an inner imperative, I should like at least to call to mind the names of those from this country to whom CEC, and each of us who has met them, owe a great deal and by whom it has been strengthened in ecumenical encounter - people such as Bishop Hans Lilje, Hans Heinrich Harms, Praeses Ernst Wilm, President A. Wischmann, Bishop Hans Gernot Jung and President H.J. Held are not merely part of the history of CEC; they are still with us <in spirit> and continue to be our fellow-pilgrims.
5. I should like to send a fraternal greeting to all the retired members of the last Presidium and Advisory Committee of CEC, to Professor Hermann Goltz and all the many people who by their participation in committees, working groups and the most diverse activities have helped to sustain the work of CEC and promote it. May God bless them!
6. First and foremost however we turn our thoughts and emotions to that worthy person who for twenty-eight years has travelled on CEC's path and played a part in shaping that path and marking it out plainly through his gentle dynamism, wise global vision and sincere, constant and consistent ecumenical commitment - his Holiness Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, our last President, will undoubtedly for many be with us for long as the real PATRIARCH OF CEC in the spiritual sense, as we shall certainly also be with him. The wish I should like to make is that we should desire to show His Holiness our affection and solidarity by sending him our greetings.

7. Ecumenical fellowship, however is not strengthened only by thoughts of gratitude but also by gladly welcoming the new things that are bestowed on it. If I rightly remember there has never previously been an Assembly of CEC that enriched this governing committee so much with new - and also young! - members as the Assembly in Prague has done. And if in this connexion I may speak not only as President but above all as the oldest serving member of this committee, I should like to give a cordial welcome to the new members of the Central Committee and ask for the abundant grace of the Holy Spirit for them, as for all of us. During his speech in Prague Patriarch Alexy addressed the youth in these words: "In passing on the ministry of love, peace and justice to you, I should like to ask you to make use of the rich experience of your predecessors without being disillusioned". In taking this recommendation as being also addressed to us, the older members, we should like to encourage those among us who are new to unite this experience with their own élan vital in such a way that tradition and renewal may continue to evolve creatively in the life of CEC.

8. We begin our work with a new constitution and new standing orders of the Central Committee. It was interesting for me to test out my own work "on my own body" first. After having been able as President of the Revision committee to play a part in shaping the new constitution and the other regulations, I was also appointed to the first office to become operative after the election of the Central Committee - that of the Interim Executive Committee - and as its President! Please let me make a few comments on this:

- a) Although the six months' term of office for this committee is unusually long, it is subject to the conditions of its interim status. And it was very exciting for me to be suddenly plunged into this interim situation: To be, and yet not to be! An entirely new experience! Of course it does not relieve one of commitments but it does keep one from the temptations of power.
- b) A committee thus appointed for a limited time knows also that it does have to function - making progress within its limits! - but not going **beyond** its limits - that is to say, not breaking the bounds of its mandate. It is likewise very exciting to be aware of one's own **limitations!**
- c) This new experience of being there for an interim period, with limitations, perhaps explains why during this period of office I read the Epistle to Diognetus from ancient Christian literature several times. What a liberating effect the knowledge of being there for the interim and having limitations might have on the danger of inertia in our churches! - to be aware that we do live in this world but only on an interim basis, as strangers; that we are on earth yet know we are citizens of heaven; and (which concerns our Central Committee above all) that we obey the law yet triumph over that law through our life, as the Epistle says. Certainly according to the new regulations everyone has the right to act legalistically, appealing repeatedly to "standing orders" or "procedure" and to one regulation or another; we have agreed on regulations in order to be able to fulfil our task in an orderly way - that is, to help the member churches to achieve the goals decided on in the Preamble to the new Constitution, both in their own lives - in their mutual relations and common efforts - and in their relations to the ecumenical and secular institutions within and outside Europe. In the true application of the new regulations I may therefore wish for all of us that we allow ourselves to be guided by the awareness which governed me during the work in the Revision Committee, that the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor. 3_:6).

9. It is perhaps unnecessary for me to present you with a detailed report on the activity of our interim team in the course of our six months' term of office. For it goes without saying that an interim president can only submit an interim report. Accordingly allow me to present a summary report as follows:
10. The Interim Executive Committee met once in Geneva and for a second and final occasion here, the day before yesterday and yesterday. We are grateful to Mr Heinrich Rusterholz for his helpful assistance as a proxy for Ms Jutta Boysen who was unfortunately prevented by illness from attending the first session. Fortunately there was a full complement of committee members at the second session. I should like to thank very cordially two members of the committee, Ms J. Boysen and Dean John Arnold; and also Jean Fischer the General Secretary and his staff for the good cooperation we had during the meetings, but also in our frequent communication with each other. You have already received the minutes of our first meeting (Geneva, 11 and 12 December 1992). A view of the topics and also our decisions have been made available to you, even if only in summary form. You have received further information through the CEC news service and other documents. During this meeting

the General Secretary and staff will give us detailed information in their reports, regarding work in Geneva, various delegations and other activities of CEC since the last Assembly. The Finance Committee has also met in the interval and will likewise give us news - unfortunately, as always, not only good news!

11. Without wishing to anticipate the evaluation of the Assembly I should like to stress just one thing - which should already be clear to all of us: that the representatives of the member churches have in fact delegated difficult tasks to us in the Central Committee - tasks which reflect the needs and hopes of the churches of Europe in the interim period between the second and third Christian millenniums. The following observations and reflexions may be helpful for our common process of thinking and decision-taking in the next few days:
 - a) We have to continue the discussion which was not completed in Prague and give it practical shape in meaningful and practicable measures. Here it is noteworthy that the report of the Policy Reference Committee (Weisungskomitee), which was approved by the Assembly, alone contains more than 150 recommendations on what should be done! These recommendations on what "should/may/must" be done require us to act "without delay" and "urgently", to achieve "the most we can", to "ensure" or "see to it that..." - and to do everything painstakingly!
 - b) The Central Committee would now be entitled to ask the member churches three short questions:
 - How seriously is this meant?
 - Who will be doing all this?
 - Who will be paying for it?
 - c) The Central Committee may at all events extrapolate two things from the statements and decisions made at the Assembly:
 - a very broad authority to act and
 - a great freedom to refer questions and tasks back to the member churches - again and again it is said that CEC (i.e. in practice the Central Committee and the General Secretariat and its staff) should challenge, encourage, stimulate and urge the member churches! We will be happy to go along with that invitation!
 - d) As regards our Central Committee, we need to give concrete shape already, during this meeting, to the commission laid upon us in Prague, in such a way that structures, programmes and the human and economic potential of CEC may help the member churches as effectively as possible to discern more clearly their common responsibility for each other and for the Europe of yesterday, today and tomorrow; and to achieve much more in common, and do so more effectively, for the churches and peoples in other continents too. In this CEC certainly has neither the intention or the right to intervene unasked in the internal life of the member churches, far less to show ways or offer solutions for church conflicts which are contrary to the tradition and canonical order of the churches concerned. Our task is to achieve what the member churches can only overcome in common and only attain in common. In regard to EUROPE and the ecumenical movement what has already been said might bear the following meaning among other things.

EUROPE

12. The process of integration among the western European states has survived grave crises in Edinburgh and has led to greater consolidation. Nevertheless Maastricht remains too bold a challenge for many. And although a justified view exists that the process of consolidation and expansion will go on, political life in several of our western European countries is experiencing serious crises. In the Yugoslav question even politics has shown almost total failure, as a result of which the monster of war is again threatening our whole region - the Balkans - and perhaps not it alone. On the other hand the upheaval in Eastern Europe is in many places accompanied by similarly murderous conflicts, and at the same time there is every indication that the process of fermentation that has been set in motion is still far from coming to an end.

13. In view of the justified supposition that still more conflicts of a religious, social, economic, political, racist, ethnic and cultural nature are to be expected in addition to those existing at present, we need to continue developing - and strengthening - the proven bridge-building function of CEC. To this effect the Interim Executive Committee has followed up the recommendation to create a mediating committee. A special Ecumenical Programme of Reconciliation and Diakonia for the former Yugoslavia was recommended to us. We shall still have to consult further on other concerns in these few days, and establish what has priority at this present time, what CEC can be responsible for on its own and what we want to take further or begin afresh together with others (WCC, CCEE, EECSS etc.).

14. Here it is not just a question of conflicts where we can use our influence in the interest of peace nor just of the material needs of people in Europe who need the balm of practical love. It is also - perhaps even in the first place - a matter of the self-understanding and life-orientation of Europeans. And we do not need any special wisdom to realise that only a common effort of the churches can have a prospect of counteracting all the different kinds of "isms" which have not weakened in the least and have uprooted whole masses of European peoples from their spiritual basis for living.

15. We are aware of our own guilt in this connexion, for instance in the de-Christianizing of European humanism. In Prague we spoke deliberately and vigorously about this and other European sins of the past - and rightly, I admit. On the other hand we did not draw enough strength and encouragement from what Europe and European Christians were able to gain for themselves and offer to others in the power of the Holy Spirit during the twentieth century. I think we should nevertheless try to reflect on this. Not, of course, for the sake of a European triumphalism which would be sheer irony in the present situation of the continent. The General Secretary, however, reminded us in his weighty report to the Prague Assembly of Jacques Delors' call to give Europe "a soul, a spirituality and a significance". 1/ This is a pre-eminent task for the European churches. Let us not cut ourselves off and end up in a

Eurocentric autarky. Nevertheless I firmly believe that Europe bears within itself the soul, the spirituality and the significance that are sought, and can rediscover them by looking into its own heart. We therefore must not relinquish what is specifically European - everything that is precious and dear to Europe.

16. In this connexion let me repeat a conviction which I expressed on another occasion: 2/ Europe needs to guard its treasure, however strong the extra-European elements may be which flow into the continent; or, more exactly, for the very reason that these elements are strong! The pluralism to which they contribute is certainly unavoidable. But it must not become determinative of Europe's destiny. This is not any kind of Christian cultural or political racism. It is a categorical imperative if Europe wants to remain what it is and what its name signifies. The Greek name Εὐρώπη first of all corrects a misunderstanding in German: Europe is not neuter (as in that language). Europe is a lady - and the Eu- suggests she is even a beautiful lady! And in fact, depending on how you interpret the term she is a far-echoing, a broad-browed, or a far-seeing lady - or all of these together! So if Europe wants to remain what her name signifies, it is high time to think seriously about the responsibility of the church for Europe's future and to act together.

Because:

- Europe should have a voice that cannot be ignored; this calls for unity.
- Europe should have a face that is presentable and worth looking at; this calls for repentance and renewal.
- Europe should be able to take the long view; this calls for wisdom, vision!

And if we have described our Prague confession - "God Unites - in Christ a New Creation" as a vision for Europe and all humanity in virtue of our faith, then that vision must not fall a victim to any other "division" (in the normal sense of the word) nor to any "divisions" (in the military sense of the word)!

THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

17. A wide field of ecumenical tasks opens up for the new Central Committee. Others have gone before us. They have made great efforts to clear the field of stumbling-blocks, to remove fences, to tear down walls impression that the time of harvest was near. In this confidence we sent out our message from Prague to the churches and peoples of Europe:

"GOD UNITES - in Christ a New Creation"!

18. Meanwhile, however, tares and thorns have grown up again all over the field. Harmful storms have brought ice and mud both in the internal life of a good many churches and in inter-church relations, and likewise among the children of God in our continent. Again we have to learn painfully that, while GOD UNITES, faith - what we believe - (when it

remains confessionally imprisoned) divides! "IN CHRIST A NEW CREATION" - yes of course! But among us there are nevertheless still Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, men and women (contrary to Galatians 3:28). Therefore a feeling of confusion and helplessness perhaps confronts us with the question, How, then, can we bestow life on everything the Assembly has given into our keeping? Manifestly the new Central Committee needs wisdom and a discerning sensitivity, it needs courage to make decisions and a creative dynamism, imagination and cooperation with and for each other - and it also needs the advice and support of all those present, so that during this meeting we may dare to take the first steps confidently, with the caution enjoined upon us and in the right direction.

Ecumenical DEFIANCE has absolute priority

19. Don't ask me, please, for advice and for a response. Rather let us together draw courage from the past and from a number of signs in the present, in order to oppose with ECUMENICAL DEFIANCE all the realities which argue that the ecumenical movement is sick. 3/ An Arab proverb says that one physician can help you, if there are two of them you can perhaps survive, but if there are more of them you are doomed! Christians know one physician! So don't let us lose time in diagnoses. Rather we should remember - and above all act!

20. We should remember, for instance, that the Conference of European Churches was born out of a DEFIANCE which - in the midst of the divisions, threats and tensions of the Cold War - its founders had the courage and prophetic vision to articulate jointly in the power of the Holy Spirit and carry through consistently. Thirty-four years later it is the privilege and an important duty of the new Central Committee, in the midst of new aberrations, hostilities and disintegration in Europe, to give a new ecumenical defiance highest priority for Europe and the whole world.

21. The second Christian millennium began with the completion of the disruption of the European Christian world through the schism between East and West (1054). Before the end of the millennium the anathemas - the bulls of excommunication between the old Rome and the new Rome - were annulled through the power of God's grace and erased from the memory of the church and from its midst (December 1965). A second great division took place in the West in the middle of the second millennium. On the afternoon of Sunday, 7 October 1984 in the Cathedral of Trent - where once the Council pronounced the anathemas against the Reformation - we, the representatives of CEC and CCEE, celebrated an unforgettable thanksgiving service together with a great crowd of rejoicing Christian people and all recited together the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, aloud and with commitment to God, as the source of hope for Europe and all Christendom. The conclusion John Arnold drew soon afterwards was: "Once again we can see that a risk for the sake of reconciliation was justified". 4/

22. The ecumenical movement as a whole and the bilateral dialogues of the Orthodox with the Anglican church and with the Protestant World Alliances have brought forth fruits which we must not shut up in the fridge. In defiance of a certain stagnation at this time, or simply because of it, CEC should in my view try to stride forward even more confidently on the way to unity and try to recognize as its specific task the deepening of Orthodox-Protestant relations and to accomplish that task.
23. Also let us not lose sight of more recent signs of hope. Let me mention just one such sign here: as we all know, the relations between our Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church have been undergoing a very great crisis in the last few years. But even here there are indications of one DEFIANCE or another. For instance, as is well known, it has for years been part of the tradition in the relations between Rome and the New Rome for delegations from Constantinople to be present at Rome for the name day of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul (28 June) and for delegations from Rome to be at Constantinople for the name day of the holy Apostle Andrew (30 November). In the context of this bridge-building tradition Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy last November brought a letter of Pope John Paul II (dated 24 November 1992) to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaeus II. Let me summarize some thoughts from that letter and from the Patriarch's speech in the form of a dialogue.

The Pope: Christ who is himself the Way (John 14:6) shows us the path we have to tread and how to do so. Only the cross effects our resurrection (Phil. 2:8). To be of such a mind among each other as corresponds to life in Christ (Phil. 2:6) can happen only through love (1 Cor. 13:4-6).

The Patriarch (to the delegates from Rome): Our world, which is everywhere in confusion, needs nothing more urgently today than love and peace.

The Pope: The dialogue that was begun was blessed by God during its first ten years and has brought forth precious fruits.

The Patriarch: The dialogue can bring forth the fruits of truth only through love and peace. All of us know that recently peace has been marred in a large part of the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches to such a degree that obstacles have appeared in the theological dialogue between our churches, to the deep disappointment of those who look to it with many expectations. Nevertheless even if peace has been disturbed we should like to believe that love has not grown cold. That would be simply tragic!

The Pope: Let us not forget that in the past we have gone through crises which were perhaps even greater than those with which we are faced today...

The Patriarch: We welcome with satisfaction your declarations in this connexion... The Orthodox churches however await with a great sense of expectation your practical actions to improve the whole atmosphere so that we can resume the dialogue and not do so only by way of the thorny question of the Uniate Church but also by way of the fundamental theological themes, the examination of which has been deferred.

The Pope: The achievement of unity has priority. Let us have the necessary gift of inventiveness to discover together how today we can experience afresh in complete faithfulness what the apostles handed down to us, and do so in the midst of a world which is very different from that of the first millennium.

The Patriarch: Today the postulate of the unity of divided Christians, for which we constantly pray, is an urgent requirement of the age. This is the demand of the Christian nations battered by internecine strife, of peaceloving citizens menaced by religious fanaticism, of all those suffering from the oppression and injustice of those exercising power in the world, and waiting for the united and undivided martyrria of those who believe in Christ. It is likewise the demand of the material Creation itself, which is threatened with total destruction because of human sins. Preventing the unity of Christians from whatever considerations of expediency is criminal!

Cardinal Cassidy: Καιρός τοῦ ποιῆσαι τῷ Κυρίῳ
This is the Kairos for the Lord, for action; or, This is the Kairos for serving the Lord. Let us ask the Lord to act, that is, to send the Holy Spirit to guide us into the work we have to do, and for our part let us obey the Lord as never before, that the world may believe.

My conclusion: Καιρός - for CEC - τοῦ ποιῆσαι!

24. I confine myself to these examples in order to express a twofold hope and request to God, to all of you and to the churches of Europe - in defiance of the present storms regarding the ecumenical movement:

- a) Let us all resolutely apply our energies in common so that nothing is lost of what God the Merciful has given us during this century on the path towards unity.
- b) May the second Christian millennium not end without an act of unity of the whole of the Christian world in Europe which will sponsor and determine the future.

I should like to see these two things as the most urgent common task and target for CEC and CCEE and to recommend them most warmly.

A.K.N. - dokimi

NOTES

- 1/ Fischer, Jean, "Die Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen in Prag" <"The Conference of European Churches in Prague">. General Secretary's report, in OEKUMENISCHES FORUM 15 (Graz 1992) 181,189.
- 2/ Papaderos Alexandros, "Leben aus der Kraft des Heiligen Geistes in der 'säkularen' Welt" <"Living in the 'secular' World in the Power of the Holy Spirit"> (a paper delivered at the ninth meeting of the Commission for bilateral theological Dialogue between the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Evangelical Church in Germany) in ORTHODOXES FORUM I (Munich 1991). 34.
- 3/ Thönissen, Wolfgang ("WORAN KRANKT DIE OEKUMENE?" in KNA-OeKI, 4/20, January 1993, p. 6) for example writes:

A variety of phenomena are at present making their appearance in the ecumenical movement. Polemically motivated innuendos, irritations caused by these, differences of opinion supposed theological differences which have long been overcome determine the climate. The results so far achieved in the bilateral and multilateral dialogues can be received in the churches only with difficulty or not at all; no-one can any longer get a clear picture of the plethora of documents that have meanwhile appeared. We are far from a breakthrough (this estimate of course applies only to the bilateral discussions conducted with the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches). The ecumenical movement totally lacks the large vision. Many observers are already forecasting an early end to ecumenical dialogue as it is practised by the majority churches and world alliances of churches.

The disparity of the attitudes described, the evaluations and assessments makes it increasingly less probable to arrive at a judgment appropriate to the situation. Above all this relates to the fact that - even in the sphere of the ecumenical movement - information from the manifold fields of ecumenical cooperation are available in such profusion that no-one any longer can get a general grasp of them, far less know how to evaluate them. Frequently because of the pervasive lack of a sense of direction pictures of the situation are spread about which are more easily accessible, easier to understand and frequently more attractively stated. Taking a closer look one can see that the situation should frequently be assessed in a more nuanced way than the general atmosphere might imply. What makes this assessment so difficult is of course the recognition that the variety of trends and developments that can be observed are no longer going on one direction but are diverging. The ecumenical movement as a whole has lost the vision for leadership. is the ecumenical movement in danger of collapsing as a result of its pluralism?

- 4/ Arnold, John, "Unser Glaube - Quelle der Hoffnung." <"Our Faith, the Source of Hope">, Okumenische Rundschau 34/3 (1985), 360.