



ccme

churches' commission for migrants in europe

beyond borders

since 1964

## Keynote presentation

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## Recalling the past...

Esteemed Church Leaders,  
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I feel very much honoured, moved, and joyful to have been given the opportunity to address you and share with you some reflections on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of CCME. I am even more moved, as among you I recognize persons that are dear to me and who bring to my mind the joint trajectories and efforts, undertaken at different times, during the past 50 years of history of CCME. I recall their enthusiasm, their commitment, but also their charisma, with which they have shaped what we know today as CCME. I believe it is fair, on this symbolic day of the celebration of half a century of CCME' life, to start by expressing my gratitude to all those who have contributed, some of them more, some of them less, to the development of CCME. Thanks should also be given to the competent and devoted staff members, to which CCME is indebted for its good name and reputation.

It is practically impossible in the limited time of a speech to do justice to the rich, multi-faced contribution of CCME through these 50 years of life and activity. So I decided not to try the impossible task of being exhaustive, but instead to limit myself in:

- a) looking back to the origins of CCME, recalling the conditions that have led the Churches, 50 years ago to its inception,
- b) providing some examples that illustrate and highlight the precious contribution of CCME, as much to its members, national churches, black and migrant churches and church-related agencies, as to the migrants themselves, to the asylum seekers, to the refugees and to discriminated populations, for instance the Roma, through lobbying the European institutions. Those interested in gaining a fuller picture can look to the website of CCME, or consult the numerous books, booklets and briefing

papers published by CCME, especially the very informative publication, compiled by Robert Mathes and published on the occasion of the celebration of its 40th anniversary, titled: "CCME 1964-2004. Facts and figures of 40 years" (Mathes 2004).

- c) And finally highlighting some aspects of its work with the actual problems, CCME is challenged to deal with in a time of globalized migratory flows and the securitisation of migration.

### a. The origins of CCME

CCME was the child of necessity and crisis. The need for the inception of such an organization appeared for the first time in the middle of the 1950s. Strong economic growth in the highly industrialized countries of Western Europe, particularly Germany's economic boom, resulted in enormous labour shortages and induced the industrialized countries to open up for immigration. The situation deteriorated with the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The urgency of the situation (Geiselberger 1972:15) led Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden to opt for establishing an active recruitment policy. Germany, for example, established a special, 222 persons strong, Recruitment Commission, which became active, in Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and Turkey, in recruiting unskilled labour. The only criteria of selection were age – candidates should have been between 18 and 35 years old - and their state of health, which the doctors of the commission established on the spot. In the countries of the European South there was a strong desire if not pressure to emigrate at the time. Underdeveloped economies and a lack of jobs produced a surplus of unemployed and unskilled labour. Dictatorial regimes pushed people from all social strata into flight and forced many of them into exile, irrespectively of their economic condition. Thus the first big intra-European migration emerged, which the Swedish sociologist Göran Therborn characterized as "*an epochal change in European social history*" (Therborn 1995:51). During the period 1955-1973, net immigration to the North from the Mediterranean countries amounted to about five million migrants (Zimmermann 2005:4).

The outflows and the inflows of such large numbers of migrants in a brief time span, naturally produced multiple problems and a social crisis, both in sending and receiving countries. Governments and societies were totally unprepared to manage the particular social and psychological problems that migration produced.

The governments set as first priority the satisfaction of the needs of the labour market. The politicians of all colour, from both the sending and receiving countries, understood migration as a temporary phenomenon, a short episode, and the problems that were produced as a sacrifice on the altar of the economic impetus (Spaich 1983:133).

Employers were happy to cover their needs with obedient hard-working, young and strong workers, but at the same time they felt perplexed about the way they should treat them. Some viewed "Gastarbeiter" as a valuable, but somehow also as an "exotic" instrument that was unfortunately delivered to them without the necessary "operation instructions". These 'operation instructions', were then compiled in a book of 176 pages by Günther Feuser. The book was published in München by "Moderne Industrie Verlag", and has been broadly used by the entrepreneurs as a quick guide. The book had an unusually long title, which betrayed the extent of the ignorance of the employers. The translation of the title reads: "*Foreign employees in factory. How to recruit, to select, to train, to insert, to spur, to pay, to accommodate, to look after and to treat correctly foreign employees*" (Feuser 1961).

Concerning the host society, most researchers agree that host societies "*though they appeared to be able to accommodate and absorb the new arrivals in practical ways—providing jobs, housing, schools, and health care*", "*were unprepared psychologically to adapt to the multiculturalizing impetus stemming from large-scale in-migration*" (cf. Taras 2009:84). Surveys of the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach have provided evidence of a very negative attitude of German citizens towards the presence of foreign workers in the country. The press, with the Bild Zeitung as spear-head, contributed to the creation of stereotypes and negative opinions and their spreading among the population. Guest workers were accused of taking the jobs from the indigenous workers, of exploiting the social security system, of being filthy, having fleas, 'running after our daughters', of being responsible for the increase in criminality, being drug dealers, of constituting a threat to the national and cultural identity. Later on they have been accused of being the cause for the appearance of far right groups, of constituting a threat to the democracy and security of the country. The negative emotions of the population find their expression in slogans such as: "Ausländer raus", "Hau ab Du, Makkaronifresser", "Asiatische Horden", "Niedrige Sorte", "accursed strangers", "Abschaum" scum, "Dreck" mess. In certain cafés, signs were posted with the warning: "Eintritt für Ausländer verboten". In Wangen in Allgäu, a historic city in Southeast Baden-Württemberg, even a league was established that did not only promote slogans, but appeared to be ready for action: "*We will teach this riff-raff the meaning of fear*" (Habbe 1983:16). Later on, violence against intra-European migrants became a reality.

Finally, migrants themselves were puzzled, confronted with the conditions that were reserved for them, with the hostility of the population, and worst of all with the isolation and marginalization. Migrants had to deal with the frustration of their expectations, as much concerning their living conditions as in relation to the promise of an opportunity to improve their professional chances by learning new skills. One significant problem they faced was that for a long time they did not have the right to bring their families to live with them.

In contrast to the political world, the Churches and charity institutions, having daily contact with foreigners, have realised the significant repercussions of the movement of people and diagnosed the seriousness of the situation. The churches recognised that they had a double pastoral responsibility: towards the foreigners established in their parishes and towards the members of their churches, who had a negative attitude towards the foreigners and sometimes were fearful. Having quickly realized that the migrants had come to stay, they tried in all possible ways to draw the attention of the politicians to the need of a targeted integration policy, which would include combating xenophobia and racism, as well as educating the indigenous population towards a smooth co-existence with foreigners. The politicians, however, were slow in understanding or accepting that "*The stranger is not the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather a person who comes today and stays tomorrow*" (Simmel 1908:509). Only when the situation turned explosive, political leaders adopted a concept and policy of integration, already practiced in Churches and charity institutions (Spaich 1983:134).

The situation, as it developed, did not leave the World Council of Churches untouched:

As early as 1955 in a meeting of its Central Committee in Davos, Switzerland, WCC began to focus attention on the migration problem. One year later, in 1956, the Central Committee of WCC authorized the undertaking of a study of this subject in preparation for a world conference to be held under the auspices of WCC. Mr Baldwin Sjollem was appointed to the staff of the Division of ICA and Service to Refugees to undertake the necessary research and prepare for the Conference. After three years of preparation this Conference gathered at Leysin, Switzerland, from June 11-16, 1961, bringing together 200 delegates, consultants and observers, representing 75 member churches of the WCC, 4 non-member churches, the Roman-Catholic ICMC, observers from 8 governments (Australia, Brazil, Canada, Greece, Netherlands, Switzerland, USA and the West Indies), the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (now IOM), the International Labour Office and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees) (World Council Diary 1961:110). The conference provided an opportunity for the churches to discuss their common concerns in the field of migration and to determine their specific responsibilities (see: Ecumenical Chronicle 1961:92-102; World Council Diary 1961:111). The WCC organized a second important conference in Arnoldshain, Germany from June 10-15, 1963. This time the organizers had invited some ten migrant workers, Italian, Spaniards and Greeks, to discuss amongst themselves their impressions and problems of life in a strange society. The Conference delegates listened silently and only at the end were they allowed to raise questions. Representatives from the European Economic Community, the trade unions and the employers' associations also participated in the discussion (World Council Diary 1964:218). Through these conferences, the exchange of information that took place, and the reflection that had been developed, it

became clear that Churches and assisting organisations, both in sending and receiving countries had to work closely together in order to respond effectively to the problems derived from migration. Further it was realised that a coordinating body was required to continuously inform and keep up to date churches and charity organisations, and to coordinate their activities. This realisation led to the decision of the inception of CCME. The constituent meeting of CCME took place in Arnoldshain in May 1964 (more in: Mathes 2004-20).

#### **b. Selected examples, illustrating the contribution of CCME**

- i. Support to the member Churches and church-related agencies to deal more efficiently with the emerging challenges they are confronted with in their day-to-day ministry with the migrants and refugees. An example I am well acquainted with, is the cooperation of CCME with the Greek Orthodox Church and its Integration Centre for Migrants and Refugees. This collaboration has been very close during previous years and has been intensified recently, due to the economic crisis that Greece is currently undergoing and to the asylum crisis as well, that has become more obvious than ever before rendering the urgent need of an inner-EU relocation of a number of asylum applicants. As western European countries seem not to be keen to take over some of the asylum seekers that have arrived in Greece, CCME has started a dialogue with the Churches in order to inform them, sensitize them, and, hopefully, involve them in a relocation process.
- ii. CCME assists member organizations to become acquainted with European programmes, to acquire expertise, to establish partnerships, to become enabled to submit projects, and also provides opportunities for joint applications and joint projects. I would like to stress the importance of this offer, particularly for Churches who do not have large mechanisms and numerous staff.
- iii. Offers opportunities for exchange and networking at a European level, as it was the case, for example, with the very successful, CAT project, that is "*Christian Action and Networking against Trafficking in Women*" (Moritz and Peschke 2003; Peschke and Moritz 2007), consisting in three consecutive projects, and being part of the more general and very significant work of CCME on Trafficking in Human Beings, both trafficking for sexual exploitation and for forced labour (Moritz and Tsourdi 2011). The CAT projects have given the opportunity to the Churches to get acquainted with the issue of trafficking, acquire relative expertise so that to become enabled to deal more efficiently with the problem and even develop their own services of assistance to the victims. In this area of work, the cooperation developed with the authorities such as the police, has been of crucial value.

- iv. Efforts to sensitize and urge the Churches to proceed beyond the simple exchange of knowledge and experiences, in sharing the responsibility and the burden, as for example by taking active part in a process of refugee resettlement (Claasen and Peschke 2004; Passarelli and Peschke 2006). It should be mentioned here, that CCME has implemented a very successful resettlement project in cooperation with the churches.
- v. Issuing warnings about the problems and the precarious position of Migrants in Irregular Situations, an issue that has preoccupied CCME already since 1973 (CCMWE 1973). Today this continues through various activities such as information exchange with the Churches, advocacy and counselling for the improvement of the living conditions of the asylum applicants, and the recent visit of the General Secretary together with Frontex at the borderlands of Europe and the reception centers there.
- vi. Advocacy for and support to the Black and Migrant Churches (Affolderbach and Vierling-Ihrig 2002). CCME follows closely the debates on migration, refugee and Roma issues in the European Commission and the European Parliament, maintains a wide network of contacts with key persons in those institutions and does advocacy work by elaborating commentaries on draft decisions and preparing and submitting briefing papers. Concerning the Council of Europe it holds an official observer status. Through these contacts CCME is able to inform its members about decisions taken and make consultations with them concerning reactions and interventions, constituting thus a channel through which the voice of the Churches is heard at the upper levels of decision taking concerning European matters.

I would like to comment here that all of the above activities, whether it is about European projects or advocacy work, are not as easily done as they are easily said and described. They require high level expertise, keeping information updated, cultivating contacts, gaining the trust and respect of persons holding responsible positions in the International Organizations and European Institutions, and, of course, persuading the other party, through high quality work. Specifically in the case of advocacy even more is required: Each decision is influenced by a multiplicity of factors and competing interests that try to get hold of the decisions. Thus, beyond expertise, deep knowledge on the issue and close follow up of all developments is required, it is important to have patience, be persistent, not to give easily up, to be alert of when is the right moment to intervene, the right person to contact and to convince. In closing this chapter of my speech please allow me to mention one success story of CCME in its advocacy work.

It is the case of the “EU Directive on the Right to Family Reunification”. In December 1999 the European Commission submitted a proposal for an EU directive to the Council of Ministers. The proposal had been debated for some three years, in which the Council made amendments leading to the downgrading

of the proposal. CCME had followed the debate and intervened on several occasions at European and national levels, convinced that family life *"is essential to societies, and that the right to family life is a cornerstone for integration of migrants"* (Vierling-Ihrig and Peschke 2004:3.1.1.). In October 2002 CCME organized a conference in Athens linked to its 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly that was to take place on the island of Aegina from the 1-4 November 2002. At the conference the late Archbishop of Athens Christodoulos and four Ministers of the government were invited and participated. Greece was to take over the presidency of the EU in the first semester of 2003. Given the place and the time chosen for the conference, it was rightly estimated that it constituted an appropriate occasion for lobbying in favour of the directive. After consultation with him, the Archbishop, agreed to put an emphasis in his speech on the importance of the family in the life of the migrant, the significance of family reunification and the responsibility of those that decide, that a young child has to wait for one quarter of its life, until it becomes possible to be together with the parents and live together as family. After the speech, the Archbishop addressed the Ministers and through them made the request to the government to help so that a decision was at last taken concerning the directive. The Greek government included the Directive in the priorities of the Agenda of the Presidency, and agreed to reduce the waiting period for family members. In the meeting of the European Council in Thessaloniki on 19-20 June 2003, an agreement on the Directive on family reunification was reached.

### c. The new challenges

The 21st century has brought about and continues to do so, substantial changes in the form of migration. This has brought the churches and CCME in front of new challenges. Without pretending to be exhaustive, I will refer selectively and very concisely to some of the changes:

1. The first has to do with migration itself. The extent, the intensity and the direction of migratory flows have radically changed and have been globalized. The countries of the European South, Greece, Italy and Spain, traditionally net emigration countries, have turned into net immigration countries. Migrants of today originate from all continents. The intensive immigration flows transformed European societies in a short time span from being relatively homogeneous, as they were in the past, to becoming de facto multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural. This produced discontent among the indigenous population, a growing sense of insecurity, cultural racism and xenophobia. Both, migratory flows and the presence of immigrant populations are largely perceived as a cause of insecurity and even as a real threat (Martiniello 2006:298). What now predominates is what has been called the *"alarming approach"* to migrants and migration. *"Residents of inner city areas are deeply concerned about a sharp rise in criminality, but also racist and neo-racist reactions"* (Doxiadis

and Matsaganis 2012:6). The recent economic crisis has a worsening effect so that these negative emotional reactions against foreigners are spread in more and more places and give rise to populist extreme-radical parties. How should Churches best respond?

2. A second change is related to the repercussions of the economic globalization and the adoption of the neo-liberal market economy by the European Union. Starting with the Maastricht Treaty and continuing since then, *means* and *ends* of the European project became inverted. The vision of the united Europe has given its place to the prioritization of the neo-liberal market economy. Following the Maastricht Treaty, an "*enforced dominance*" of economy on politics has occurred. "*Financial markets are now monitoring national and European policy while politicians are seeking to promote economic efficiency* (Boyer 2000:86; O'Dowd 2001:69). The abolition of internal borders was not intended in the first place as a promotion of a policy of unification for Europe, but targeted what has been characterized as a process of "*negative integration*", understood as the lifting of barriers to the operation of market forces. This in detriment of the "*positive*" integration "*through the development of supranational institutions and cultural identification with the EEC*" (O'Dowd 2001:69-70). This shift towards the neo-liberal economy has brought welfare systems to a crisis leading to the deconstruction of the welfare state. The economic crisis and welfare state crises have led to an unprecedented number of European citizens facing unemployment, precarity and destitution.

Par excellence, victims of this situation have been from/in the South European countries that means the countries that constitute the southern borders of Europe. In Greece for example, among others, the unemployment rate has risen to between 30% and 64% depending on gender and age group. For the first time after the German occupation, in Greece the phenomenon appeared that a significant section of the population, including people that still have a job, have rely on free meals offered by the Church and other charitable organizations. Of course, among those benefiting from free-meals, are a lot of migrants. I will not proceed here to explain, how this situation has poisoned the relations of the local population with migrants. The question that arises is, what is the responsibility of Churches in such a situation? Is it enough to provide a bowl of soup to the new poor? What could be the role of CCME in all that?

3. A third change, closely associated with the two previous ones, is the return of the phenomenon of emigration, out-migration, in the so called new receiving countries, that is those countries in the South of Europe that had turned into immigration countries in the decade of the 1990s, after the fall of the iron curtain. However, this time, they do not export the surplus of unqualified labour, but instead exactly that part of the labour force which constitutes their main hope for development and exit from the economic recession.



These are young people, highly qualified, who studied abroad, hold Phd's and are proficient in many foreign languages; the economic crisis has made them indispensable, and at the same time superfluous in their home countries. Some seek employment in Europe, especially France, Germany and United Kingdom, while many, go to Australia, USA or Canada to pursue better chances, or due to sheer despair. Research in Greece has established that during the years of economic recession, around 350 thousand of university graduates have left Greece. During the first three quarters of 2012, 26 382 people have emigrated from Greece to Germany, while the numbers from Italy and Spain are even higher, 32 633 and 27 056 respectively. For their countries, this constitutes a brain drain, while in the countries of destination, they are considered indispensable and are welcomed, as it was the case with the Gastarbeiter in the 1960s. Realizing the problem CCME has elaborated and submitted to the European Commission, the first project about this new type of intra-European migration.

4. The 50th anniversary of CCME is celebrated under the slogan "Beyond borders, since 1964". In the 50 years history of CCME, this has acquired different meanings, as, throughout this period, the meaning and function of borders kept changing. During the life of CCME and until the decade of the 1980s the national states had stable, and sharply demarcated borders, "*within which they achieved an unprecedented degree of control over the economy, politics and culture of their citizens and a capacity to regulate cross-border flows*". National borders had ceased to constitute a cause for wars and division between people, as it was the case in the past history. Through the development of international trade the state borders started to become all the more porous and gradually developed into gates of communication for peaceful collaboration and exchange of goods and services, a process that came to its completion, through the abolition of the internal borders in the EC. "*The only security barrier was the Cold War border which divided eastern and western Europe*" (O'Dowd 2001:69). The fall of the iron curtain and the Berlin Wall, did not lead to a reduction, but to the multiplication of borders in the European continent and to a renewed modification of their function. Instead of a united Europe and a "*Europe without borders*", we have now reached a Europe of permanently amplified and shifting borders. Now "*we have a Europe of Borders and a Frontex rather than a 'Borderless Europe'*" (O'Dowd 2001:68). The border policy of Europe has tried to cultivate a new reality of borders and a new "belonging". The erection of the fortress Europe and the emphasis put on the control of the external borders "*as barriers against illegal immigration, refugees and asylum seekers*", has favoured a new semiology of borders. The borders do not simply signify a belonging and an identity, but also the superiority of those to be found inside, in contraposition to the *inferior others*, who do not belong and have to remain 'extra muros'. These can cross the borders only clandestinely, assisted by smugglers and traffickers. This however means putting their lives at risk.

Lives of men, women, and children are lost on a daily basis in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Those that manage to survive are according to the law not just clandestines but also criminals, who have to be kept at temporary camps, under appalling conditions, until they are deported. The work of the local Churches and CCME as well, becomes, among others, a diaconia at the borderlands of Europe, both actually and conceptually. The borders at stake are not ending at the actual territorial borders, but a whole chain of borders and barriers installed between people, starting from the more abstract ones through which people are allocated to either the category of “we” or to the category of ‘other’, like belonging to the wrong ethnicity, or to a religion that raises suspicions, and further on to the practical ones such as linguistic and bureaucratic barriers. The diaconia related to migration has to address them all.

#### d. Conclusion

I hope and wish that CCME has the opportunity to continue, offering in the years to come its precious, desired and necessary services to all its members, Churches, migrant churches, small churches, and church-related agencies, as well as proceeding with its advocacy work to the European National Governments, the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of Europe, in defence of the rights of the migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, irrespective of religion, ethnic origin and legal status, since for us Christians “there is no difference between Jews and Greeks, between slaves and free men, between men and women” (Galatians 3,28), exactly as there are no ‘illegal’ persons.

*Athens, 25 March 2014*

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