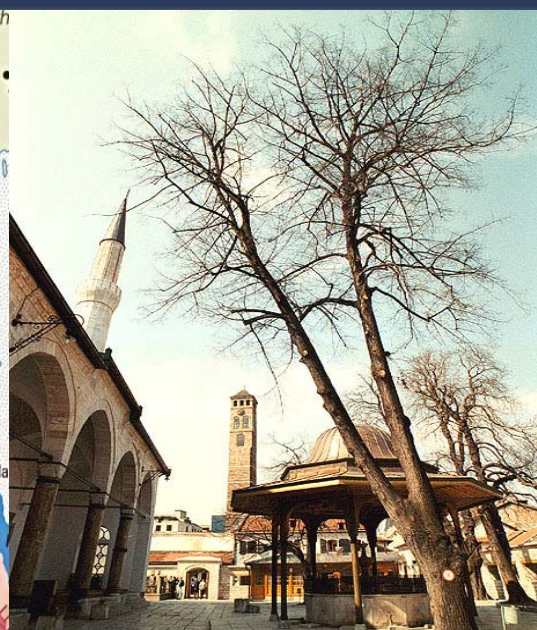


# WCC in Central & Eastern Europe

## **Regional Strategy 2003-2006**



**World Council of Churches**  
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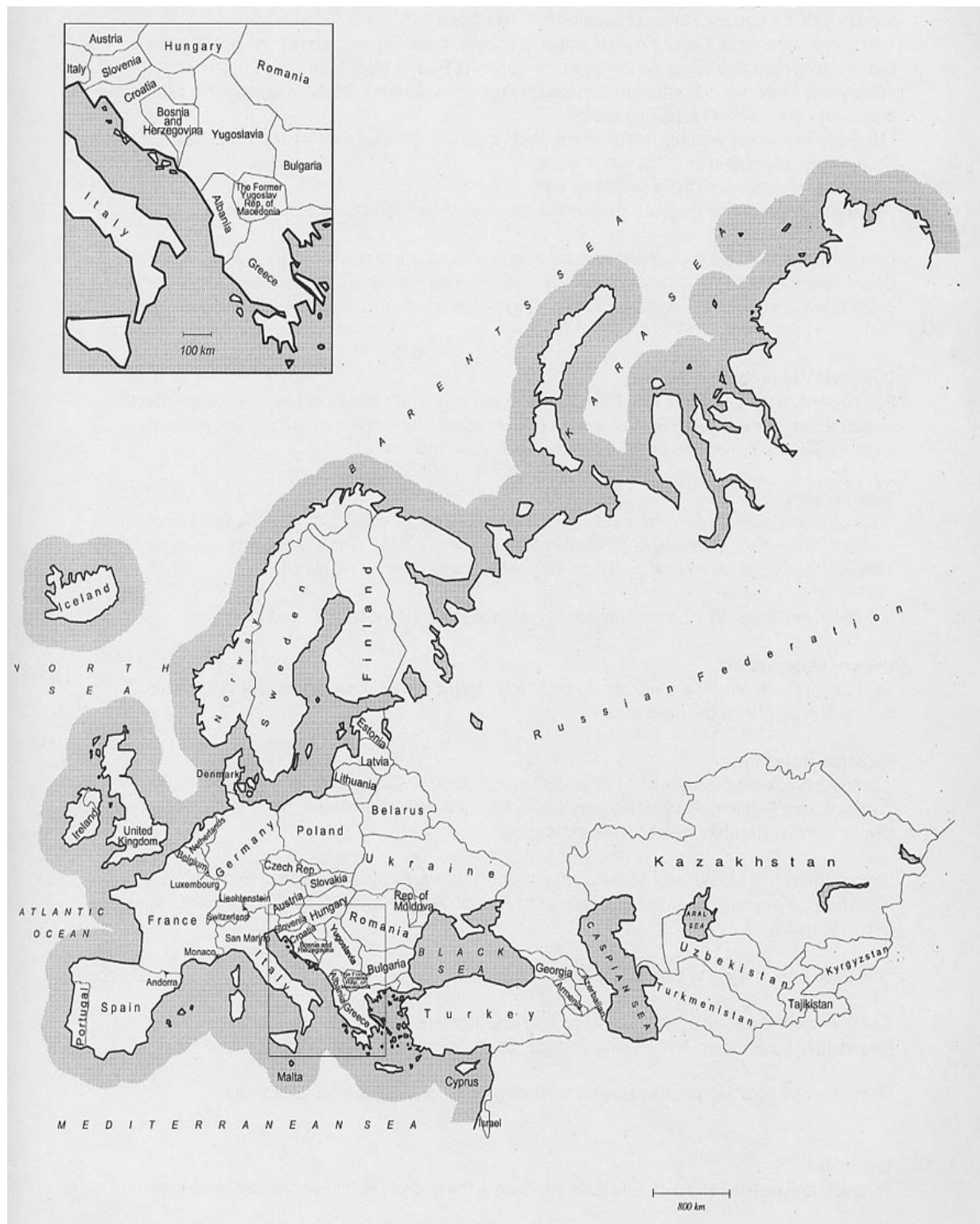
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First published August 2003.  
Cover design: Alexander Belopopsky.  
Photos: Romanian nun (Peter Williams); Map of ethno-linguistic groups in the Caucasus; Sarajevo (Peter Williams).  
Updated versions and related information available on: **[www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/europe](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/europe)**.

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## Map of Europe



## **1. Introduction**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has a long history of engagement in the Central and Eastern European region. While church life and WCC's programmatic activity was restricted or impossible during the communist period, relationships and efforts increased significantly in response to the historic changes in the region after 1989-1991.

Recognising the ongoing challenges in the region after a decade of transition, in 2002 the WCC staff leadership initiated a process of consultation and strategic discussion on the future role and priorities of WCC in the Central and Eastern European regions.

The purpose of the present strategy paper is to set out some of the main directions the WCC will take in Central and Eastern Europe, in the context of the issues and challenges facing societies, churches and the ecumenical movement in the region. It offers an overview of the programmatic involvement of WCC with its members and partners in the region over the last ten years, and it seeks to identify the major directions and commitments of WCC in the period 2003-2006, until the WCC 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly. The paper will serve as a reference for WCC's programme planning and engagement in the region during this period, and will also serve to inform WCC's membership, constituency and stakeholders about WCC's focus in this region.

The strategy paper has emerged from a request of the WCC staff leadership in early 2002 to develop a process of consultation with churches and other stakeholders with view to clarifying and strengthening the mandate of WCC in the region, and the role of the Eastern Europe Office. The process of consultation has involved WCC staff, the Conference of European Churches (CEC), sister organizations, member churches, major stakeholders and WCC governing bodies.

## **2. The context and major trends in Central & Eastern Europe**

### **Definition of the region**

Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is as much a concept as a geographical definition, and as with other definitions it has cultural and political overtones. Changing borders and geopolitical configurations in the area have confused the usage of terms such as Central, Eastern and indeed Western Europe. For the purposes of this paper, the region is broadly defined as including all the 27 former socialist countries, in almost all of which WCC has European member churches. This definition includes several groupings or sub-regions:

- 4 'Visegrad' countries of Central Europe: Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia;
- 8 'Balkan' countries: five countries which formerly constituted Yugoslavia (Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia-Montenegro (including Kosovo) and FYR of Macedonia<sup>1</sup>, and the internationally-administered entity of Bosnia-Herzegovina) and Bulgaria, Albania, Romania;
- 3 Baltic countries: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (and the neighbouring Russian enclave of Kaliningrad);
- 4 CIS/former Soviet countries: Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova;
- 3 Caucasian states : Armenia (including Nagorno-Karabakh), Georgia, Azerbaijan;
- 5 former Soviet Central Asian countries : Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.

### **An extraordinary decade**

The political changes which swept through Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 liberated millions of people from repressive and often violent regimes. The legacy of communism was, for the most part, devastating. Along with economic under-development compared to pre-communist trends, came the confirmations of massive human rights violations, enormous environmental devastation and, less

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<sup>1</sup> The official United Nations name for the Republic of Macedonia is 'The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia'.

visible, profound psychological disorientation or even trauma for many people. For many churches the magnitude of these events were of more than simply historical importance. 'In the light of faith and prompted by the Holy Spirit, we would like to discern in the present moment genuine signs of God's presence and purpose (...) these events demonstrate a genuine kairos in the history of salvation and they offer an immense challenge to carry on God's renewing work, on which the fate of nations ultimately depends'.<sup>2</sup>

### **Major trends in the region 1989-2003**

The events after 1989 should be placed in a broader context. During the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the CEE region has experienced revolution and upheaval on an unprecedented scale. The communist regimes which took power after WWII introduced oppressive systems of political and economic control. The revolutions that shook Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 surprised many. However, the changes found few prepared to assume the challenges and transformations that the new era would introduce. The number of independent countries in the region has doubled since 1991 – excluding the emerging new entities in Kosovo or in the North Caucasus. The decade has undoubtedly been a period of new freedoms, but also of upheaval, of change, and even of disintegration for Central and Eastern European societies – the 'other half' of Europe.

### **Social and economic upheaval**

The liberation from communism has been at a heavy price. The period of transition since 1989 has had a significant socio-economic impact on all countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and the impact has varied considerably. Although many countries have succeeded in forging new and viable political institutions, the economic transition to the market has proved much more difficult, with generally much worse indicators in the former Soviet Union (FSU). According to UNDP<sup>3</sup>, this region has undergone the sharpest welfare reversal of any part of the world during the last decade, and most Central and Eastern European countries have experienced unprecedented poverty and mortality increases. The UNDP calculates that in the region over the last decade the number of poor has increased by over 150 million, and in some countries the majority of the population lives below the poverty line. National incomes have declined dramatically, income inequality has grown and mortality rates have climbed alarmingly in the FSU. In short, transition has proven to be a complex and traumatic process for most of the region, although with different degrees of impact.

Demographic pressures will affect the economic performance and political cohesiveness of these new states. Because of low birth rates and falling life expectancy among males, the populations of the Slavic core and much of the Caucasus will continue to decline; Russian experts predict that the country's population could fall from 146 million at present to below 130 million by 2015. The underlying demographic changes have been sharpened by the massive movements of people. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1990, politicians and commentators in Western Europe began to worry about the risks of massive migration from East to West. While this has happened in a limited way, a far more complex and important movement of people has taken place in the former Soviet Union. According to the UNHCR, since 1989, around 9 million people have moved between the countries of the CIS – one in thirty of the population. While some of the movement is constituted by forcibly displaced persons or refugees from conflicts (3 million persons), many millions more were obliged to move as a result of the dissolution of the USSR, and faced a highly uncertain and insecure future.<sup>4</sup>

According to a recent expert study by the US government<sup>5</sup>, the economic challenges to the former Soviet countries in particular are daunting: due to insufficient structural reform, poor productivity in agriculture as compared with Western standards, decaying infrastructure and environmental degradation. Corruption and organized crime, sustained by drug trafficking, money laundering, and other illegal enterprises and, in several instances, protected by corrupt political allies, will persist. In 2002, UNAIDS reported that the region of Central & Eastern has seen the some of the highest growth

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<sup>2</sup> Final Declaration of the Catholic Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops, Rome, 28 November – 14 December, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> UNDP, *Poverty in Transition?*, Regional Bureau for Europe and CIS, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, Information document for CIS Conference on Refugees and Migrants, Geneva, 30-31 May 1989.

<sup>5</sup> In 'Global Trends 2015: A Dialogue About the Future with Non-governmental Experts' available on [www.cia.gov/nic/](http://www.cia.gov/nic/).

rates of HIV/AIDS in the world, with alarming prospects for the future.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1: Eastern Europe compared to other regions: key human development indicators (1990s average)**

	GDP per capita, (percentage change 1989-1995)	UN Human Development Index (average change)	Population (% annual growth 1990-1994)	Homicides & purposeful injuries (per 100,000, percentage change)	Infant mortality rate (percentage change 1989-1995)	Life expectancy (% change, 1990s)	Consumer Price Index (average annual % growth)
Central Europe	4.0	0.1	-0.6	48.8	-26.3	0.8	152.8
Former USSR (Slavic Reps)	-35.7	-5.2	0.5	96.0	6.3	-3.8	582.1
Former USSR Caucasus	-58.0	-5.2	0.5	116.4	-16.6	1.1	N/A
Western Europe	N/A	1.3	0.4	2.4	-27.8	1.1	4.1
World Average	N/A	1.7	1.4	N/A	N/A	0.3	109.4

Source: UNDP RBEC

### National Minorities

Combined with demographic pressures are the challenges posed by national minorities in the region. Of the over 400 million people living in Central and Eastern Europe, about one fifth are members of minority groups within their own country. There are one hundred cases where a minority nationality has a population of at least 1% of the population, or over 100,000 people. Of these, there are 31 situations where minorities form over 5% of the population or over 1 million persons. The Roma or Gypsy population in the region is estimated at 6 million, and constitutes a small but conspicuous minority which is marked by poverty. In some cases, national minorities perceive themselves as marginalized and challenge the legitimacy of current international borders.

### Positive trends

The complex and difficult social and human welfare context should not hide the fact that millions are enjoying freedom ways that they never thought possible even a decade ago. There is positive 'passive' legacy in the region, including the high level of education, low level of public debt, and the relatively wide access to basic social services (although the situation varies widely). In several countries, the transition from centralized government and economies to democratic systems and market economies has been peaceful and to a major extent achieved in record time. Democratic governments, a free press and social welfare systems have been reformed and revived, although weak states and inexperienced democratic and civil society institutions are still a major challenge. Most Central European countries have surpassed their GDP levels of 1989, and this is expected to further improve following their accession to EU membership in 2004.

### Integration and disintegration

The enlargement to the East of the European Union (in 2004) and of NATO provide a symbolic cultural recognition and a new hope to several countries mainly in Central Europe, although the economic consequences of accession is not easy predictable. This integration is also a significant manifestation of political will of some Western European countries, keen to limit the risks of instability in Europe. However, the high expectations of 'Euro-Atlantic integration,' and the new 'silver curtain' or 'Brussels curtain' appearing along the former Soviet frontier, may enhance divisions and fault lines in Europe, which threaten new forms of disintegration.<sup>7</sup> Perceived as a 'velvet' transition, it is sometimes forgotten that at least ten armed conflicts have interrupted the transition, and the break-up of the federal states (USSR, Yugoslavia) and the renewal of national identities in many parts of Europe have resulted in inter-ethnic conflict, often along historical religious fault lines between the Byzantine East and the Latin West, or between Muslims and Christians. The North Caucasus and former Yugoslavia are the most mediatised – and most tragic – of several zones of confrontation, including the North Caucasus (Chechnya), Moldova (Transnistria), Georgia (Abkhazia) and Serbia (Kosovo), which remain unresolved in 2003. The NATO-led intervention in

<sup>6</sup> UNAIDS Press Release, 28 November 2001.

<sup>7</sup> See discussion in K. Raïser, 'Breaking down borders in today's Europe', lecture at the Casa Locarno Association meeting, 25 May 2002.

Kosovo, and the ongoing international mandate in Bosnia and Herzegovina, have created territories which are highly dependent on outside support. These entities are also a sharp reminder that Western powers, with or without UN mandate, continue to play a decisive role in the region. In other places, weak states and fragile political processes render democratic transition vulnerable, and underlying tensions, unresolved injustices and suppressed identities remain significant in many societies.

### Integration and conflict

The future of Central and Eastern Europe cannot be conceived in isolation from trends in the broader continent, and indeed, in the wider world. For at least one specialist, there are two underlying forces at work in Europe: integration and conflict. 'Europe, it seems, has a unique capacity not only for integration processes that can achieve the highest level of multi-cultural civilisation, but also relapses into episodes of the bloodiest savagery that world history ever saw.'<sup>8</sup> The shape of the future of Europe, including Central and Eastern Europe, will depend, at least in part, on the role of the churches and of the ecumenical movement.

## 3. The church and ecumenical context of Central & Eastern Europe

### The religious context

The religious and ecumenical context of Central and Eastern Europe is complex and varied, although the lack of precise data limits analysis. The level of religious practice varies highly across the region. Surveys and census figures reveal that most people claim some sort of religious affiliation except in the Czech Republic and in parts of former East Germany, where a majority claim no religious belief. The great majority of religious adherents is Christian. Traditional and often majority Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches exist alongside significant indigenous Muslim communities, Buddhist populations (in Siberia) as well as multiple new religious movements which have flourished since the new freedoms in the region. Generally, the Roman and Greek Catholic (Eastern-rite) churches are strong in Central Europe (including Croatia), while the Orthodox churches form the largest Christian constituency in much of the Balkans region and the former Soviet Union. Albania is the only majority Muslim country in geographical Europe (excluding Azerbaijan), although there are also large Muslim populations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Republic of Macedonia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Russia, and they are dominant in former Soviet Central Asia. The historical Jewish communities were ravaged by the holocaust (with the exception of Bulgaria), and by recent emigration. Lutheran and Reformed churches have significant minority communities in Romania (Transylvania), Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and parts of the Baltic region. In most other parts of the region, Protestants form less than 1% of the population.

**Table 2: Main religions in Europe (full region, estimated 2000)<sup>9</sup>**

Religion/Confession	Adherents (2000 estimate)	%
Roman Catholics	285,977,000	39.2
Orthodox	158,105,000	21.7
Protestants	77,528,000	10.6
Anglicans	26,637,000	3.7
Pentecostals, Evangelicals	59,000,000	9.2
Independent Christian	29,000,000	4.0
Muslims	31,566,000	4.3
Jews	2,500,000	0.4
Buddhists	1,547,000	0.2

Source: *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2001

<sup>8</sup> M. Emerson, *Redrawing the Map of Europe*, London, Macmillan, 1998, p. xvii.

<sup>9</sup> Statistics are taken from (ed.) Barret et al, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2001. Most figures are based on the declared membership of the faith group, and do not necessarily reflect the actual number of practising adherents.



### **Churches during communism**

The Central and Eastern European region has experienced an extraordinary decade since the fall of the communist regimes. Ten years after the spectacular series of events in Eastern Europe that culminated in the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the role of the churches in this complex region continues to provoke interest and controversy.

In countries subject to communist regimes after WWII behind the 'Iron Curtain', treatment of Christianity varied. In all countries, churches were pressurized or persecuted. After initial attempts at suppression, the regime in Poland was forced to come to an accommodation with the Roman Catholic Church, whereas in Albania religion was outlawed and all places of worship were closed. In the USSR, the Leninist and Stalinist mass killings of clergy and believers was followed by periods of persecution or manipulation of religious institutions. In Hungary and Czechoslovakia 'peace movements' were formed among the clergy to foster a compromise with the State, which led to internal differences within the churches. In most churches various forms of dissidence developed, and the churches offered a unique space for 'alternative thinking' through *samizdat* or underground publishing and even political opposition. The very pursuit of a spiritual life may be seen as a form of political protest. In some countries, Christian groups played an active role in ending Communist domination, for instance Catholics in Poland and, to a lesser extent, Lutherans in East Germany and the Reformed Church in Romania.<sup>10</sup>

### **Churches after 1989**

The events of 1989 and the subsequent years of upheaval would have a profound effect on the churches and societies of the region, and the importance of these events was quickly recognized by ecumenical organizations, including the WCC: 'The world is at a turning point in its history. The dramatic and breathtaking events of 1989 in Eastern Europe, closely following and accelerating the changes in the Soviet Union, have altered the course of history. It is not just the Cold War that has ended but the post-war Europe (...) These changes that were unthinkable even a year ago will have profound consequences for the churches (...) around the world. They have long-term implications for the ecumenical movement and for WCC in particular.'<sup>11</sup> A number of key issues have asserted themselves in across the region, and will undoubtedly continue to be important for the life of many churches in the coming years.

### **Religious and spiritual revival**

Many churches in the region have undergone a powerful spiritual and material revival over the last decade. The visible restoration of church life is impressive: the return and reconstruction of church buildings, public actions, flourishing church art and charitable activities, and the massive return of lay people in the daily life of churches. Most of all, the period has been marked by the return of the churches to the 'public sphere', as important political and social actors. The physical re-emergence of churches has been accompanied by signs of a profound spiritual renewal in many contexts, demonstrated, for example, by the widespread increase of religious practice, particularly in the first part of the 1990s, and the re-opening of monasteries and the revival of large pilgrimages. Women and young people have been at the heart of this revival of faith, and the numbers of young Eastern Europeans visiting Taizé is one example of this. In many places the churches have responded to the new freedoms in remarkable ways. The churches have energetically renewed their ministries in key areas – educational, diaconal, and missionary – and have sought to restore their role in society. The importance of the church has grown and its visibility and moral authority in society has been significant across the region. The social response of churches has also developed significantly, as communities have moved beyond the imposed limitations of the worship community and have initiated and renewed social actions, usually at the local level, in response to immediate needs and demands. Although there are examples of church and religious revival in most countries, its intensity varies significantly. But it is arguably in the sphere of education where church gains may have the greatest impact. In the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia,

<sup>10</sup> For a fuller discussion see: O. Chadwick, *The Christian Church in the Cold War*, London, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> WCC Central Committee, Document No. 16, 'Changes in Socialist Countries and Some Implications for Churches and WCC', Geneva, March 1990.



theological faculties, which had been separated from the universities in the late 1940s or early 1950s, have now been allowed to re-affiliate with local state universities. Potentially far more important, however, are efforts to restore religious instruction in state schools.

### **Ecumenical and inter-church relations**

However, religious revival has not automatically meant ecumenical renewal. During the communist period, the churches often co-existed and cooperated in remarkable ways. However, these same churches have sometimes found it difficult to collaborate in the new context, as they struggle to restore their own identity and role. International ecumenical involvement has also proved difficult, and, at times, conflictual. During the Cold War, Eastern European church delegations were pressurized to advocate a 'loyal' political agenda, although this was also used as a cover for authentic relationships. Many Eastern European churches, especially the Russian Orthodox Church, were able to make significant material contributions to international ecumenical meetings. But when Western ecumenical forces mobilized against apartheid and Latin American dictatorships, there was apparent indifference to the dramatic anti-Christian persecution in the Eastern bloc, and the ecumenical institutions were discredited in the view of many believers.

The opportunities for ecumenical encounter remain limited. There are only seven organized National Councils of Churches (NCCs)<sup>12</sup> in the region, although there are other informal inter-church and inter-religious bodies. Difficult inter-church relations are manifested in several areas. The search for national identity has often been manifested by the differences in religious affiliation, and, for some, confessional allegiance has become incompatible with ecumenical commitment. Renewed confessional identities and fundamentalist trends have led to tensions between majority and minority churches, and a challenging of ecumenical commitment, noticeable in all churches. Splits have occurred within confessional groups along ethno-linguistic lines, for example among the Reformed communities in former Yugoslavia, or between rival Orthodox groups in Moldova. The unresolved historical tension between the Orthodox and the Greek-Catholic (Uniate) churches, notably in Ukraine, have led to painful and sometimes violent conflicts. Historically, the ecumenical organizations have not been involved in mediating 'internal' church disputes. However, splits within individual Protestant member churches, and disputed situations such as those in the Orthodox churches of Moldova, FYR Macedonia, and Estonia, also impact the broader ecumenical situation.

The response of some churches in the new situation has been isolationism, defensiveness and, in some cases, virulent anti-ecumenical attitudes. The Baptists of the former Soviet Union were the first church to leave WCC (and CEC) in 1992, and some Reformed and Lutheran groups have sought to strengthen their relations and support from the more 'traditionalist' sister churches in the West or US and away from the international confessional and ecumenical organizations. By 1998, the Orthodox churches of Georgia and Bulgaria left the World Council of Churches as a result of perceived doctrinal liberalism and compromise.

### **Proselytism**

Foreign and local missionary activities, and concerns over proselytism and canonical territory, have contributed to tensions and conflicts among churches in much of the region. Christians who had suffered deeply for the right to practice their faith did not accept being told after 1989 by Western 'missionaries' that their beliefs were 'old-fashioned' – or plain wrong. After 1990 new laws allowing religious freedom were passed in several countries, and foreign religious groups came to Eastern Europe in great numbers. Surveys reveal that in the former USSR alone, there were almost 6,000 Western and Korean Protestant missionaries in 1997.<sup>13</sup> However, foreign proselytism has statistically had only a limited impact in the region over the last decade, but is still perceived as a major threat by the traditional churches, especially by the Orthodox. The visits of the Pope to Ukraine and Georgia, against the desire of the majority of local Christians, have only reinforced the perceptions of an 'expansionist' Catholicism. The concern about external Christian competition is shared by some

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<sup>12</sup> Formal ecumenical bodies (Ecumenical or National Councils of Churches) exist in Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia and Slovenia with emerging inter-church entities also in Croatia, Latvia, Romania, Bulgaria and Russia.

<sup>13</sup> Elliott and Deyneka, 'Protestant Missionaries in the Former Soviet Union,' in *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia*, New York, 1999.

Protestant communities, and many historical Protestant churches in the region have also experienced a sense of pressure from their Evangelical Western sister churches.

### **Inter-religious relations**

There are two major dimensions of religious freedom in this region. The first is the relationship between the traditional churches and religious communities and the multiplication of new religious movements since 1989. Secondly, in some parts of the region, Christian-Muslim relations are important, particularly in the zones where there is a concentration of indigenous Slavic or other Muslims, notably in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Southern Russia. Tensions and conflicts have emerged among religious communities, most notably in former Yugoslavia where civil war erupted along historical-religious dividing lines, and in Georgia and parts of Central Asia, where minority religious groups have suffered attacks and persecution from other religious communities. The relationships vary greatly according to the country. In former Yugoslavia the establishment of inter-religious councils in Bosnia and Kosovo has done little to dispel the deep-rooted suspicion and fear that haunts Orthodox-Muslim relations. In Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church has supported Islam to be mentioned as a traditional faith in the Russian Law on Religions, and has initiated an inter-religious committee involving Orthodox, Muslims and other major faith groups in the country. By contrast, in almost all countries in the region, the historical churches (majority and minority) have generally demonstrated hostility towards the emergence of new religious movements, whether indigenous sects or foreign religious organizations, which are perceived as being dangerous for the well-being of disoriented populations.

### **Church-State relations**

The political role of churches in Central and Eastern Europe has attracted considerable and controversial attention from Western institutions and human rights organizations. Churches in this region have struggled to restore their legal rights, and to find new arrangements with the political authorities. Differences have emerged between the 'historical' or traditional Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches, and the new churches which have been established in some countries. Together with fundamental right of worship and expression, churches have emphasized four basic priorities: legal registration and status; the restitution of property confiscated by the communist regimes; the status of religious education in schools and pastoral access to other public institutions; and the financing of church institutions and, in some cases, of clergy by the state. Generally, churches have reached some agreement in these areas in Central European countries, while much is still unresolved in CIS countries. There are no official state churches in the region, although in Georgia and Bulgaria the Orthodox Church is recognized as the historical or 'national' church, although constitutionally the church is separated from the state. The Roman Catholic Church has a concordat arrangement with several states, and in some countries a particular church or group of religions is recognized as having a particular historical role. In some Central European countries, the state directly subsidises churches and clergy salaries, although this is not the case in the former USSR. Regardless of official status, churches in most countries have sought to find a new *modus vivendi* with the state authorities, and have assumed a new role at the level of state ceremonies and symbolism. This visible connection between church and state should not hide underlying tensions, differences and unresolved difficulties in the daily institutional life of churches. A concern about the relationship of majority and minority churches, their recognition by the state, and guarantees of religious liberty, have emerged as a priority in some contexts. The rights of minority religious communities have justifiably been of concern to international observers, but the rights of majority churches should also not be neglected when they are subject to state interference.

### **Bilateralism and multilateralism**

Another important factor in inter-church relations has been the multiplication of forms of international inter-church assistance. After the fall of the Berlin wall, many churches, parishes and agencies in the West started developing bilateral relations in a number of important areas of their life and witness. The Dutch Protestant churches, for example, estimate that there are over 1,000 West-East parish partnerships and projects, many pre-dating 1989, and there are over double that number in Germany. In some cases these relations have proved to be extremely constructive, and have built new

ecumenical relationships. In other cases they have reinforced emphasis on denominational identity, have created new dependencies (e.g. a Western parish funding the running costs of a church project in the East), or have focused simply on efficient programme delivery. The emergence of ecumenical platforms of cooperation in the region have been undermined by the privileged place of denominational links, and the churches and international church organizations including WCC have not found adequate ways to resolve the tensions which arise when bilateral relations ignore the need for a broader accountability.

### Churches and civil society

Churches were largely unprepared for the challenges of freedom following the collapse of communism, and lacked trained leaders, and a concept of their new role in a liberal, pluralistic context. In the 1970s and 1980s, the churches struggled to survive in hostile environments. Recently-opened archives confirm the degree of infiltration and collaboration with the secret police that affected all churches, and Christian educational and social work virtually ceased to exist in most countries. There are many examples of semi-clandestine groups, movements and seminars with more freedom than the institutional churches. In some contexts the churches did offer a real context of ‘alternative thinking’, and in countries with greater tolerance, even of political dissidence. In the new political context of post-communist Eastern Europe, it was natural that disoriented populations often looked to the church for an affirmation of their particular national and confessional identities. Weakened states and compromised political systems left the churches as one of the few credible institutions, with unrealistic expectations from society. Churches were asked to fill a vacuum left by the State, especially in the area of social care and public morals, and have found themselves at the centre of civil society.

There are many examples of Christians and churches actively responding to these new challenges in society. Eastern European churches provided the foundation for much of the political change in 1989, and new political leaders often claim a ‘Christian’ identity. To quote one famous former dissident and subsequently president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel: ‘the persecution [of Christians] lent greater moral authority to the Church and believers, so what was meant to displace Christians from society actually reinforced their ties with all those defending human rights and attempting at spiritual freedom and civil liberty.’<sup>14</sup> However, in critical situations, Christians did not always offer a common witness in society. In some situations, churches have actively sought to reconcile their broken communities, through creative approaches with the most vulnerable groups. But churches also readily aligned themselves with partisan national and political interests. When conflict erupted in the Balkans, many churches blessed the departing armies, but Christians also provided a powerful voice of reason, peace, and charity, despite the manipulation of religious symbolism in some situations. Throughout the region, churches have developed remarkable diaconal, educational, ecological and other initiatives. And while churches have generally avoided the temptation of direct political interference, they have often acted with a ‘co-responsibility’ in their own societies, and, in doing so, have discovered a new political influence.

### Memory and healing of memory

The relationship of the churches to the communist regimes, and the recognition of compromises and even collaboration, has been one of the more painful and difficult processes facing churches and ecumenical organizations in this region.<sup>15</sup> Many of the official structures of forced collaboration have been disbanded.<sup>16</sup> In Hungary, for example, the Free Church Council (which performed administrative functions for the State Office for Church Affairs) and the controversial ‘patriotic priests’ organization, *Opus Pacis*, were both dissolved in late 1989. In Czechoslovakia, *Pacem in Terris*, the state-sponsored association of Catholic clergy, condemned by the Vatican in March 1982, was disbanded on 7 December 1989. The Christian Peace Conference, based in Prague and long tainted by its collaboration with its communist backers, decided to continue its operations, but to try to redefine its

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<sup>14</sup> President Vaclav Havel’s Address to the Delegates of the FIACAT European Conference, Prague, 5-8 October 2000 (unpublished).

<sup>15</sup> Further explored in Ed. L. McSpadden, *Reaching Reconciliation: Churches in the transitions to democracy in Eastern and Central Europe*, Uppsala, Life & Peace Institute, 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Summary based on S. P. Ramet, ‘The Churches of East-Central Europe in Transition’, in *East-West Christian Ministry Report*, Chicago, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1994.

role. In Hungary, the so-called 'Theology of Diakonia', under which the late Lutheran Bishop Zoltan Kaldy advocated church cooperation with the regime, was repudiated, and a process of theological re-examination was begun. In the German Democratic Republic's final months, Christians openly began to criticize the slogan 'Socialism is the Gospel in action.' Orthodox churches have also struggled to come to terms with their own past. In Romania, Patriarch Teoctist resigned following the 1989 Christmas revolution, although he was subsequently requested to resume his functions, and in Bulgaria, criticism of Patriarch Maxim's relationship to the communist regime was one reason for the schism in the Orthodox Church. In Russia, the Jubilee Council of Orthodox Bishops in 2000 canonized hundreds of the 'new martyrs' killed by communist repression, in an ecclesial act of restorative justice.

The international ecumenical organizations, and especially WCC, have also been subject to severe criticism for their stance during the communist period, and especially for their apparent failure to react to the persecution of churches in several countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Criticism has been strongest among the minority churches of Central Europe. The unresolved issues of this period continue to undermine confidence in the ecumenical organizations, and weaken Protestant-Orthodox relations in some contexts. The need to initiate substantial reflection on the past has been recognized by the WCC leadership and governing bodies, notably during the WCC General Secretary's visit to the Czech Republic in 1999 when he called for the 'painful history' to be 'revisited', and at a Central Committee plenary dedicated to reconciliation and the churches in Central and Eastern Europe in Potsdam in 2001.<sup>17</sup>

Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexis II echoed the words and thoughts of many church leaders when in a sermon in 1992 he said 'These last decades have brought on our people suffering of an atrocity that it is not possible to describe. Millions of people (...) died as martyrs. For others there was spiritual destruction, absence of freedom, the bitterness of moral compromise (...) The fault weighs on several generations of our ancestors and on ourselves. We know that we are not worthy. We do penitence in front of Our Lord (...) and with all our hearts we pray: Lord God, give us the strength to renew and purify ourselves.'<sup>18</sup>

### A shifting ecumenical agenda

Ecumenism today in the region is therefore confronted with a complex situation, full of uncertainties. In some ways, the ecumenical vocation of Christian unity has been integrated into the self-understanding of most churches. At the same time, we see an increase in denominationalism and the need to confirm particular identities that undermines the spirit of unity. The ecumenical situation often mirrors the socio-economic environment, and the forces of globalisation and related fragmentation that we witness at work in the world today. This situation has both theological and sociological dimensions which merit further analysis.

The broader socio-political context has also impacted the ecumenical agenda. Political issues, with European integration at the centre, increasingly seem to be more important for churches than the traditional core issues of unity and communion. The momentum of theological dialogues has lost some of its dynamic as churches focus on new options in place of 'traditional' ecumenical structures. New inter-religious platforms in the region, attempts to create new Protestant organizations and thematic initiatives taken by individual churches are examples of the shifting ecumenical agenda and the changing role of the ecumenical movement in the region.

The momentous changes that continue to shape Europe will continue to demand a particular ecumenical response. European integration, bridging the East-West fractures, healing divided regional memories are all important tasks for the churches. Churches have shaped European civilizations and spiritualities, and are challenged to renew their role in giving 'a heart and soul' to Europe.

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<sup>17</sup> WCC Central Committee Minutes of the Fifty-First Meeting, Potsdam, Germany, 28 January-6 February 2001

<sup>18</sup> Sermon of Patriarch Alexis II on the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of St Sergius of Radonezh, 8 October 1992, quoted in A. Nivière, *Les Orthodoxes Russes*, Brépols, Paris, 1993, p.104.

#### **4. Overview of WCC involvement in Central and Eastern Europe**

WCC has been involved in Central and Eastern Europe since its foundation in 1948, although its role was always limited by the communist regimes in these countries. The WCC and other international ecumenical organizations sought to respond to the new and unprecedented situation in this region in a number of ways. After 1989, the WCC sought to engage with its member churches to analyze and dialogue on important challenges, and to develop common responses. Immediately after the changes, a series of ecumenical team visits, dialogues and consultations were arranged with churches in the region. Already in 1990, WCC member churches were expressing their hope about the new situation, but also admitting anxiety about the expectations they faced from society. 'In face of the dramatic changes, which have given rise to anxiety and resignation on the one hand, and have created utopian expectations on the other, the churches are committed to a biblical understanding of the human condition and to the proclamation of the Gospel as the only true source of renewal in the lives of individuals and societies'.<sup>19</sup>

WCC, with related church agencies, undertook a number of new programmatic initiatives with the churches in this region during the last decade. The work has been organized from WCC in Geneva, with the appointment of consultants and the formation of programmatic offices according to need. The main capacity has been concentrated in the Europe Desk in Geneva, with a WCC Eastern Europe Office focusing on the CIS countries since 1994, and later with special consultants placed in the Balkans. Round Table programmes have engaged with the churches and their priorities in numerous countries of this region, and multiple projects, exchanges, publications and networks have been facilitated with the involvement of the WCC. An overview of the WCC programmatic involvement in the regions is given below and in the Appendixes.

##### **Church and ecumenical relationships**

Emphasis has been given to restoring dynamic relationships among churches in the region. In challenging or conflictual situations, in former Yugoslavia in particular, WCC has endeavoured to maintain spaces of dialogue among churches, sometimes in spite of severe criticism, and has regularly organized visits to churches, published reports and endeavoured to 'give voice' to churches. WCC collaborated closely with CEC during the 1990s to develop reconciliation efforts in the Balkans region. A special study on Uniatism and its ecumenical significance was undertaken by WCC as this issue emerged as critical in parts of Eastern Europe during the early 1990s. Orthodox-Protestant relations have been a special concern throughout the period, with particular concern following the withdrawal of two Orthodox churches – Georgia and Bulgaria – from WCC membership. More recently, the work of the Special Commission on Orthodox Relations with the WCC has responded to the particular concerns of the Orthodox churches, many of which are based in this region.

##### **Religious freedom and church-state relations**

The complex and sometimes conflictual nature of church-state relations in the region has inevitably been of concern to WCC. However, since CEC has a specialized capacity to deal with these issues in its Church and Society Commission, WCC has refrained from developing its own agenda on church-state issues, and has sought to monitor and intervene in specific situations in cooperation with its sister organization. Some specific situations have involved WCC more directly, for example the responses to repeated appeals of the Hungarian Reformed churches in Romania, or minority church rights in Bulgaria and Georgia. WCC International Relations convened a meeting on Religious Liberty in the region in late 2001, and WCC supported a major CEC conference on related issues in 2002.

##### **Social diakonia and humanitarian assistance**

The single most important area of WCC response to the region, at least in quantitative terms, has been in the area of diakonia, or social and humanitarian response. Immediately after the changes

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<sup>19</sup> Report of the WCC consultation, 'New developments in Central and Eastern Europe: challenges for the witness of the Church', held in Moscow, 14-19 May 1990.

## **WCC Regional Strategy in Central & Eastern Europe**

commenced and the first requests from churches became apparent, WCC working with partner agencies and churches, initiated a range of social and humanitarian programmes in response to the dramatic human needs that became visible. The mobilisation of Western churches and agencies at this time was exemplary, and several major relief efforts were organized in Romania, Russia, Georgia and other places in the early 1990s. In parallel, WCC worked with churches to establish or strengthen local capacities for social outreach to the most vulnerable in society: street children, the elderly, refugees and migrants and those without resources. In the framework of ecumenical Round Table programmes, as in other regions, WCC brought together churches, agencies and other partners to agree comprehensive and coordinated diaconal programmes in several countries.

In 1994, WCC established an Eastern Europe Office in Poland (see Appendix III), to accompany and assist churches and related partners in the region in developing effective and community-based diaconal responses to social need through the development of appropriate social infrastructure, capacity-building of personnel, and networking of local initiatives. Greater efforts were given to strengthening local church-related organizations, where possible on an inter-church and national level. By the mid-1990s, ecumenical programmes facilitated by WCC were being implemented in Russia, Georgia, Albania, Armenia, Romania, Bulgaria, FYR of Macedonia and the Czech Republic, to be followed by new initiatives in Poland, Central Asia, Slovakia, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine.

Particular efforts were mobilized in response to the tragic conflicts that erupted in former Yugoslavia; alongside the promotion of dialogue, communication and justice, WCC-related partners provided one of the largest and most consistent humanitarian operations in the region. This and other emergency efforts were strengthened following the creation of a specialized emergency coordination unit by WCC and LWF, ACT International – Action by Churches Together, in 1996. ACT has also facilitated capacity building and new forms of networking across the region. Following a visit to the war zone in former Yugoslavia, WCC founded the Ecumenical Women's Solidarity Fund in 1993 to minister to the voiceless victims of the war – the women and children. In 2000, following intensive advocacy and relief work of ecumenical partners during the Kosovo crisis, WCC Europe staff launched the South-East Europe Ecumenical Partnership with the aim of mobilizing churches and partners in the Balkans to promote peace and reconciliation, refugee return and capacity building efforts. WCC also worked with and through a number of specialized international ecumenical organizations: the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME); Aprovech, the association of WCC-related development agencies in Europe; and ecumenical youth and women's networks.

By the year 2000, the WCC Europe Desk and Eastern Europe Office could count 15 countries in Central and Eastern Europe where systematic ongoing ecumenical efforts in the fields of social diakonia and humanitarian assistance were being carried out by churches with the support and involvement of WCC and related partners. In 1999, WCC Europe-related ecumenical partners working in Central and Eastern Europe agreed to form an open network for ecumenical development cooperation, the European Regional Partnership Group (ERPG) that meets annually, and which has developed into the largest forum of church-related diaconal organizations in the region.

### **Education and Ecumenical Formation**

The need to renew religious and theological education was upheld as a fundamental priority by most churches after 1989, following decades of state restrictions in this area. In 1992 the WCC Central Committee mandated a priority programme on religious education in Central and Eastern Europe, with particular focus on Orthodox churches. The programme focused on curriculum development, teacher training and writing skills development, and a number of pilot projects were supported.<sup>20</sup> A number of the Round Table programmes involve an educational component, especially in Russia, where the Round Table programme prepared and published dozens of titles urgently needed by the churches. Other less-visible ecumenical education projects were carried out in Georgia and Serbia. In the recent period, WCC's Education and Ecumenical Formation team appointed a consultant for the

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<sup>20</sup> For a detailed account see: T. Pirri-Simonian, *On the Trails of Education Work in the World Council of Churches: A Personal Assessment*, WCC, Geneva, 1998.

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theological education, similarly to other regions. WCC's Ecumenical Institute at Bossey has strengthened the enrolment of students from the region. The WCC has also developed regular English-language training, involving ecumenical exposure, in Romania and the Czech Republic, and WCC individual scholarships benefit church candidates from the region. In 2001, the WCC Executive Committee affirmed the need to strengthen ecumenical formation in a region where anti-ecumenical sentiment remains strong.

Other notable WCC initiatives in the Central and Eastern Europe region include new efforts to develop common ecumenical action for health and healing (through WCC's mission team), and especially in response to the looming HIV/AIDS crisis in parts of the region. WCC's Justice, Peace, Creation has developed work with churches on the impact of globalisation in Eastern Europe, and is focusing on a new project with churches to safeguard the ecology of the Black Sea region.

## 5. WCC church constituency and partners in Central & Eastern Europe

### WCC's constituency in Central and Eastern Europe

WCC has an important constituency in the Europe region. There are 78 member churches in the Europe region including associated member churches (second only to the Africa region), 25 of which are in Central and Eastern Europe. Over half of WCC's constituency, measured in people, is located in Europe, of which the majority is in the Central and Eastern Europe region. The largest WCC member church is the Russian Orthodox Church, and the great majority of WCC member church constituencies is Orthodox in this region, with an estimated 127 million members in Central and Eastern Europe. There are also sizeable Protestant member churches in Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and the Baltic countries.

**Table 2 : WCC Member Churches by region**

Region	Total member churches <sup>21</sup>	Number of WCC member churches (%)	Total church membership <sup>22</sup>	Total church membership (%)
Africa	89	26%	91 641 485	20%
Asia	73	22%	39 733 524	9%
Caribbean	11	3%	2 326 500	1%
Europe	78	23%	233 997 589	52%
Latin America	27	8%	1 598 334	<1%
Middle East	12	4%	9 390 800	2%
North America	32	9%	70 331 201	16%
Pacific	17	5%	1 917 500	<1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>450 936 933</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 3 : WCC Member Churches in Central & Eastern Europe by confessional family**

Church family	Total member churches <sup>23</sup>	Number of WCC member churches (%)	Total church membership <sup>24</sup>	Total church membership (%)
Baptist Churches	1	4%	41 400	0.03%
Hussite Churches	1	4%	500 000	0.36%
Lutheran Churches	9	36%	1 343 129	0.98%
Old Catholic Churches	2	8%	58 000	0.04%
Orthodox Eastern Churches	6	24%	127 715 748	92.84%
Orthodox Oriental Churches	1	4%	4 756 000	3.46%
Reformed Churches	5	20%	3 145 000	2.29%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>137 559 277</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

<sup>21</sup> WCC full and associate member churches (EKD=3 churches, Lutheran, Reformed and United).

<sup>22</sup> Total individual members as communicated to WCC Geneva, excluding diaspora communities.

<sup>23</sup> WCC full member churches excluding associate churches (no data available).

<sup>24</sup> Total individual members as communicated to WCC Geneva, excluding associate member churches and diaspora communities.



## **WCC Regional Strategy in Central & Eastern Europe**

WCC works primarily directly with and through its member churches, and with non-member churches where the context allows. In countries where there is a national council of churches, WCC also works closely with these ecumenical bodies.

### **Conference of European Churches**

In almost all areas of its mandate and programmatic efforts, WCC has sought to closely collaborate with its sister organization, the Conference of European Churches (CEC), one of the Regional Ecumenical Organizations (REO). The WCC Central Committee has affirmed the need for mutual information, consultation and collaboration between WCC and the REO in each region.<sup>25</sup> The regular meetings of the WCC-CEC liaison group, and the annual meetings of the REO general secretaries with the WCC, have proved to be useful mechanisms of information-sharing and consultation. However, joint programme planning has not always been possible, and the division of labour which does exist between WCC and CEC is not always clear to the broader constituency. WCC has initiated a process of discussion on an eventual 'reconfiguration' of the various international ecumenical organizations, which may lead to a rethinking of structures and relationships.

### **Christian World Communions**

WCC collaborates closely with the main Christian World Communions or international church organizations. In Geneva, close cooperation is maintained with the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and ongoing relationships with the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches are maintained, mainly through the WCC General Secretariat.

### **Church-related organizations**

In its daily programmatic work, WCC also relates to a range of church-related organizations, NGOs, networks and movements which may or may not be related to WCC member churches. Some of these are recognized by WCC Central Committee as organizations in working relationship with the WCC, and may be connected to a multilateral programme such as a Round Table, or to a specialized church organization focusing on a particular issue. In most countries in Central and Eastern Europe, WCC has sought to strengthen a recognised national inter-church platform of cooperation, either within the national council of churches where that exists, or an alternative structure or organization. These structures can serve to ensure both an agreed ecumenical framework and an intermediary coordination and resource point between local partners and international organizations.

### **Specialized agencies**

In addition, WCC works with a number of ecumenical agencies in Europe, most of which are specialized ministries of the churches in the area of development, diakonia and related issues. These agencies have an important role both as WCC member church-related organizations, as donors, but also as sources of expertise and specialized capacity for programmatic interventions. The WCC serves as a common framework for reflection and action by these agencies in the area of diakonia and development cooperation.

### **Ecumenical organizations and church networks**

The WCC also works with international organizations of the churches and related agencies, including notably the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, the Ecumenical Church Loan Fund, Oikocredit internationally, and on the European level with AprODEV, Eurodiakonia, and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe. The WCC will continue to encourage the development of the main Christian youth and women's networks in Europe, including the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe, the World Student Christian Federation, the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women and Syndesmos, the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth.

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<sup>25</sup> WCC Central Committee 'Guiding principles for relationships between regional ecumenical organisations and the WCC'.

## **6. WCC strategic priorities in Central & Eastern Europe 2003-2006**

In this complex and demanding context, WCC needs to regularly assess and renew its work, based on its mandate and constitutional tasks, and recognizing WCC's evolving and limited capacity. In order to do this a careful analysis of the context is required, some of which is summarized in this paper. WCC is mandated first of all to carry out its constitutional tasks, and respond to the needs and demands of its membership. In addition, WCC must situate its own work in the context of a broad and diverse reality of churches, organizations and ecumenical partners in Europe, and especially its relationship with the Conference of European Churches. Human and financial resources are limited and in some cases are decreasing. The priorities in the region of Central and Eastern Europe need to be placed in the framework of these constraints, and in line with WCC's global priorities.

The WCC Constitution states that 'the primary purpose of the fellowship in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe'.<sup>26</sup>

The document 'Objectives and Areas of Responsibility of the Teams' adopted by the WCC Central Committee (Document No. Pro 4, September 1999) states that the 'internal structure' of the WCC is a 'mechanism for organizing effectively the day-to-day work undertaken by the staff to carry out the decisions and policies made by the governing bodies'.

The WCC governing bodies and staff leadership have provided various additional policy and programmatic statements or guidelines for the organization, including:

- WCC's institutional mission: WCC Constitution and the Common Understanding and Vision Policy;
- The WCC Programme Committee has specifically upheld two 'Council-wide initiatives' as central during the coming years: the Decade to Overcome Violence; and the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC;
- WCC thematic framework adopted by the WCC Central Committee in 2001: Being Church; Caring for Life; Ministry of Reconciliation; Common witness and service amidst globalization;
- Programme team mandates: Faith & Order; Mission & Ecumenical Formation; Diakonia & Solidarity; Justice, Peace, Creation; International Affairs.

Taking into account this diverse framework, a number of major areas of programmatic engagement may be highlighted as ongoing or emerging strategic priorities for WCC in Central and Eastern Europe during the coming years.

### **Strengthened analysis: monitoring developments and divides in Europe**

The momentous changes that are shaping Europe in 2003 will continue to demand a particular ecumenical response. European Union enlargement to Central Europe, new security arrangements, and the proposals for European Constitution all bring new importance to bridging the East-West divide, and to healing divided regional memories. WCC may contribute to deeper understanding and exchange among churches in this region through increased analysis and information.

In 2003-2006 WCC will seek to more effectively support CEC and other organizations to monitor and influence the important political processes shaping the Continent. In 2003, WCC International Relations will develop a policy paper for discussion and adoption by Central Committee about the churches in the changing European context. Specifically, WCC International Relations together with the Europe Desk will continue to monitor church and political developments in South-East Europe and the Caucasus, and to formulate appropriate responses. The WCC Europe Desk will develop its web-page as a 'knowledge base' about church life in Central and Eastern Europe ([www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/europe](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/europe)).

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<sup>26</sup> Article III of the WCC Constitution, as amended by the WCC Eighth Assembly.

### **Deepening the fellowship of churches and widening ecumenical networks**

The WCC constituency in Central and Eastern Europe is large but undermined by sociological pressures and strengthened denominational identity. There is a limited involvement of member churches from CEE in the broader fellowship. Particular challenges are posed to WCC by the Orthodox constituency, especially at the local level, and some priority needs to be given to enhancing spaces and opportunities for Orthodox-Protestant exchange and building of mutual understanding and confidence. The limited WCC scope in the region means 'selective' relationships, called on in times of crisis or of need. The region is also one of the most limited in terms of ecumenical networks and collaboration, for obvious historical reasons. WCC will seek to identify new ways of engaging churches and ecumenical organizations in the region, including the possibility of enabling new regional or sub-regional ecumenical networks and platforms, and more deliberate information and networking initiatives.

In 2003-2006, WCC programme desks will seek to strengthen direct communication with its member churches through more effective communication tools, and use of the internet. WCC will find ways of enabling NCCs and other ecumenical organisations, forums, ecumenical officers of the churches to interact regionally. Diakonia & Solidarity will renew efforts to strengthen relationships with the Europe regional desk officers of ecumenical agencies. The ongoing WCC dialogue with Evangelical churches will also involve representatives from this region. WCC General Secretariat, WCC Communications and other teams will seek to strengthen debate and reception of the conclusions of the Special Commission on Orthodox participation in WCC, and will promote initiatives and develop materials which strengthen tolerance, understanding about and exchange among churches in the region. As part of the effort to strengthen communication, the use of Russian language in documents and on the WCC website will be increased.

### **Religious freedom, church conflicts and church-state relations**

Historically, with notable exceptions, church-state and related issues have been left primarily to the work of CEC, while WCC has worked more on the global level and in other regions. However, there is an increasing number of specific appeals addressed to WCC that require a response, and there is also the more fundamental need to analyze and develop reflection on models of religious pluralism that respect history and tradition, and do not simply impose a single (Western) model on all situations. WCC could also offer a more active role in mediation in international church disputes, and could serve as a 'broker' in strengthening ecumenical discussion and consensus on substantial issues of concern.

In 2003-2006, WCC International Relations and the Europe Desk will seek to strengthen monitoring of church-state relations and inter-church conflicts in the region. WCC will work with CEC to advocate for equitable treatment of all churches in situations where religious and human rights are threatened, through interventions with the appropriate authorities and by informing church and public opinion world-wide. Particular attention will be given to the Caucasus and Balkans sub-regions, and to more effective use of the internet as a knowledge and communication tool. In the Balkans, WCC Inter-Religious Relations and Dialogue will develop its involvement in inter-religious dialogue, and the Europe Desk will maintain its programmatic involvement in the region in support of networking and exchange.

### **Ecumenical diakonia: responding to human and social need**

There will be ongoing acute poverty and human need in many parts of the region. The historical commitment of WCC to diakonia and to working with the churches in response to social needs will be continued with a renewed focus. The ecumenical Round Table programmes serve as platforms or national instruments of ecumenical diakonia and international development cooperation, but need further development. Specific areas of acute need may require more focused attention by church-related organizations, especially the development of the HIV/AIDS epidemic or trafficking of women and children. The concerns for effective programme delivery and 'professionalization' of church social work needs to be related to a renewed theological understanding of diakonia, resource sharing and Christian community. Special attention needs to be given to defining the relationship with other partners involved in diaconal issues, including CEC, Aprove, church-related agencies and Eurodiakonia. WCC Diakonia & Solidarity will maintain close coordination with ACT-Action by Churches Together in the area of humanitarian relief in Europe.

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In 2003-2006, WCC will undertake an assessment of the ecumenical Round Table programmes with the aim of strengthening the quality, coherence and sustainability of multilateral church diakonia and development cooperation. A survey of ecumenical development cooperation, and information resources about WCC-related organizations in the region, will be prepared and disseminated. WCC will advocate for ecumenical agencies to maintain their involvement in Europe. WCC will simultaneously work with CEC following the Trondheim Assembly (June 2003) and Eurodiaconia to promote greater coherence and synergy among the regional networks for ecumenical diakonia. The WCC-related European Regional Partnership Group (ERPG) may evolve into a network for ecumenical development cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe. WCC Health & Healing will seek to coordinate churches and partners and develop elements of a common strategy for countering HIV/AIDS in the region, including the development of appropriate theological and educational materials. Greater attention will be given to working with CEC and other partners in efforts to combat trafficking of human persons in Europe.

### **Strengthening the role of churches: capacity-building**

Following a decade of complex and difficult transition, churches in many countries have restored essential ministries and have revived their basic infrastructure. Many identify a new need to strengthen and 'professionalize' their work in all areas, including social assistance, education or specialized skills. Ecumenical capacity building should have a theological as well as an organizational dimension, and a more ambitious approach could enable the churches to have a more coherent and effective role. Networking, information services, consultancy services could all contribute to enhancing the churches' role and influence in society. WCC Diakonia & Solidarity will also work closely with ACT in emergency management training. Capacity building will be linked with ecumenical formation whenever possible.

In 2003-2006, the WCC Europe Desk and Eastern Europe Office will seek to strengthen the national platforms of diakonia and development cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe through a renewed focus on capacity building, organizational strengthening and ecumenical formation of church-related organizations, especially in the CIS countries and in South-East Europe.

### **Mission, theological and religious education and ecumenical formation**

Theological and religious education remains a key priority for most churches in the region. While WCC has given attention to this area of work, the needs of the churches are often immediate and practical, and WCC may need to develop more flexible methodologies and instruments. Education for openness and education for tolerance are emerging key areas. Ecumenical formation should become a more visible priority, as requested by the WCC Executive Committee in 2002. Ongoing efforts at leadership formation, language training and specialized studies through Bossey and the scholarships programme will be encouraged.

In 2003-2006, WCC Ecumenical Theological Education will maintain its commitment to forming a network or association of theological schools and religious educators in the CEE region, to strengthening ecumenical education in theological schools, and will encourage the development of information resources, initiatives and materials which promote ecumenical formation, encounter and exchange within the Central & Eastern European region. WCC will remain involved in networks of religious educators involved in the region. WCC Justice, Peace, Creation will organize a meeting of women theologians from the region. WCC Mission & Evangelism together with CEC will organize a school for evangelism to explore contemporary mission issues in the region in late 2003. WCC Europe Desk will explore ways of developing a new ecumenical formation initiative in and for Central and Eastern Europe after 2003.

### **Justice, peace-building, creation**

In 2003-2006, WCC Faith & Order will support initiatives which promote church reflection on the spiritual and theological resources for peacemaking. The office for the Decade to Overcome Violence will develop peace-building resources appropriate for the Eastern European context. WCC will continue to support the development of ecumenical women's and youth organizations in the region. WCC will also maintain its involvement in ecological initiatives where these involve the churches in the region. WCC Justice, Peace, Creation will continue to monitor new forms of racism and

xenophobia, including in the Eastern European region. Attention will be given to the impact of globalization, especially on young people in the region.

### **7. Geographical focus of WCC's programmatic work 2003-2006**

The nature of WCC as a membership organization, and as a Christian fellowship, implies that it is difficult to limit programmatic work geographically: WCC should be where its member churches are, and respond to needs in all places. However, in practice, limited resources mean that WCC must focus its work, and is concerned to do this intentionally.

A major concern of WCC in the coming period will be the risk of new divides in Europe, following the enlargement of the European Union eastwards, and the impact on the countries outside the European Union, in the former Soviet Union and Western Balkans. A second priority as outlined above is the attention to the Orthodox churches in the region, because of the important size of this constituency, and also in order to deepen the involvement of these churches in WCC following the report of the Special Commission, and to counter the anti-ecumenical trends in some of these churches. In prioritizing its focus, WCC will also take into account specific historical and linguistic relationships among countries. Therefore in 2003-2006, WCC will concentrate its programmatic involvement in the following sub-regions:

**CIS countries: Armenia, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova:** WCC will work through capacities based in the region (see below) to develop analysis, information-sharing and effective platforms of ecumenical cooperation in all these countries and also at the regional level. A special focus on social diakonia, theological education and ecumenical cooperation will be maintained.

**South-East Europe: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Rep. Of Macedonia, Romania, Serbia-Montenegro (including Kosovo):** WCC will seek to strengthen diaconal work and ecumenical collaboration in this region, and will emphasize regional initiatives and networks. Particular attention will be given to enhancing church efforts for peace, tolerance and stability across this region.

In other countries, WCC will maintain a reduced involvement, unless there is a specific request from its member churches. In Slovakia and Poland, WCC will continue to facilitate ecumenical cooperation in the area of social diakonia mainly on capacity building, information and networking levels. WCC will work in other ways with the other countries where there are member churches, through participation in networks, events and limited direct project support. In (former Soviet) Central Asia, WCC will continue to support the involvement of ecumenical agencies in development cooperation, and will strive to strengthen the partnership with churches in this region.

### **8. WCC programmatic capacity, methodologies and resources 2003-2006**

The ongoing financial pressures on WCC will mean developing new and flexible ways of working in the period 2003-2006. In all areas, WCC will seek to clarify and strengthen its working programmatic cooperation with the offices of CEC, with the Central and Eastern Europe coordinator in Aprovev (Brussels), and with other specialized organizations and networks in the region.

In all sectors of work, WCC will concentrate on ecumenical coordination, information-sharing, networking and capacity-building functions at the regional and sub-regional levels, and will reduce its direct involvement in the funding and selection of individual projects.

WCC will maintain a regional desk mainly focused on Central & Eastern Europe as part of the Diakonia & Solidarity team. The WCC Eastern Europe Office based in Poland will be maintained with a new mandate, and will focus on diakonia and capacity building in the CIS (former Soviet Union) countries. WCC will maintain a consultant for theological education based in Russia who will

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concentrate on networking and development of materials for theological schools in Central and Eastern Europe.

In South-East Europe, WCC will maintain a programme office in Croatia focusing on the Ecumenical Women's Solidarity Fund work with women's organizations, capacity building and peace and reconciliation efforts in former Yugoslavia. Additional flexible staff capacity will be deployed in South-East Europe to coordinate other WCC efforts in the region, notably the South-East Europe Ecumenical Partnership.

In all areas of staffing in Europe, WCC will seek to strengthen the quality and coherence of its management and administrative skills through training and technology, and will increase transparency and accountability to member churches and partners, mainly through improved information-sharing.

The financial resourcing of WCC's work is beyond the scope of this paper. However, WCC will work to consolidate current donor support for ongoing programmes, and will seek to diversify its sources of funding for work in this region (looking actively for local resources and alternative international funds) .

### **9. Conclusion**

Following ten years of transition the churches have responded in extraordinary ways to their new situation. Churches continue to provide a source of moral values and critical reflection in their society, and have developed a remarkable social, educational and pastoral activity. With exemplary solidarity, Western Christians have mobilized to assist the rebirth of their sister communities. But the risk of further divisions in Europe along cultural and religious 'faultlines' should not be underestimated. New forms of ecumenical dialogue and cultural understanding are urgently needed. Churches and human rights organizations in the West must remain vigilant – but must also seek to understand the recent history and internal reality of their Eastern counterparts. According to James Billington, U.S. Librarian of Congress and specialist on Russian issues, the West has an immense stake in the future direction of church life in this region. The key element in how churches assume their role in the future, he writes, 'will be the way (...) people come to grips with perhaps the greatest Christian martyrology of the twentieth century (...) and the century's largest mass conversion to Christianity during the last decade.'<sup>27</sup> The WCC and the broader fellowship of churches could offer a crucial contribution.

*Alexander Belopopsky  
Mirosław Matrenczyk*

*Geneva, revised July 2003*

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<sup>27</sup> James Billington, 'The West's Stake in Russia's Future,' in *Orbis* 41 (1997).

## WCC Regional Strategy in Central & Eastern Europe

### Appendix I

#### WCC member churches in Central & Eastern Europe

Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania	400 000	Albania	Orthodox Eastern
Armenian Apostolic Church (Etchmiadzin)	4 756 000	Armenia	Orthodox Oriental
Czechoslovak Hussite Church	500 000	Czech Republic	Hussite
Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB)	193 000	Czech Republic	Reformed
Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia	53 613	Czech Republic	Orthodox Eastern
Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession	40 000	Czech Republic	Lutheran
Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church	200 000	Estonia	Lutheran
Baptist Union of Hungary	41 400	Hungary	Baptist
Lutheran Church of Hungary	301 925	Hungary	Lutheran
Reformed Church in Hungary	2 000 000	Hungary	Reformed
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia	250 000	Latvia	Lutheran
Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Poland	1 000 000	Poland	Orthodox Eastern
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland	80 000	Poland	Lutheran
Old Catholic Mariavite Church in Poland	24 000	Poland	Old Catholic
Polish Catholic Church in Poland	34 000	Poland	Old Catholic
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania	16 346	Romania	Lutheran
Evangelical Synodal Presbyterial Church of the A.B. in Romania	32 000	Romania	Lutheran
Reformed Church of Romania	800 000	Romania	Reformed
Romanian Orthodox Church	19 762 135	Romania	Orthodox Eastern
Russian Orthodox Church	100 000 000	Russian Federation	Orthodox Eastern
Reformed Christian Church in Yugoslavia	22 000	Serbia & Montenegro	Reformed
Serbian Orthodox Church	6 500 000	Serbia & Montenegro	Orthodox Eastern
Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Yugoslavia	50 000	Serbia & Montenegro	Lutheran
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia	372 858	Slovakia	Lutheran
Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia	130 000	Slovakia	Reformed



**Appendix II**

**Areas of major WCC programmatic engagement in Central & Eastern Europe 1991-2003**

**Selected WCC visits to the region:**

1991	Albania (first contact with Albania after the changes)
1991	USSR study visit to Kiev, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Brest
1991	Romania ecumenical study visit
1992	Former Yugoslavia (first visit to the country after the outbreak of the conflict)
1992	Armenia-Azerbaijan (meeting with political and community leaders; invitation to religious leaders to meet in neutral territory)
1992	Bulgaria (meeting with humanitarian organizations)
1992	Albania (membership of the Albanian Orthodox Church, new Round Table)
1993	Georgia (related to situation of conflicts in Abkhazia and Ossetia)
1994	Armenia (team-visit to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh)
1995	Chechnya, Russian Federation (to assess the needs of people in the conflict)
1996	Belarus ecumenical study visit
1997	Bulgaria (ecumenical study visit after the WCC/ACT programme)
1998	Russian Federation (ecumenical team visit to Russian Orthodox Church)
1999	Serbia ecumenical pastoral visit (during Kosovo crisis and NATO bombing campaign)
1999	WCC General Secretary visit to Czech Republic
2000	Ukraine study visit and partnership meeting
2000	Balkans Media Visit (FYR Macedonia, FRY/Kosovo, Montenegro)
2002	Moldova study visit
2003	WCC General Secretary visit to Russia, Ukraine and Belarus

**Major WCC strategy meetings about the region:**

1990	WCC Central Committee Statement on Issues Arising out of Developments in Central and Eastern Europe, Geneva
1990	New developments in Central and Eastern Europe: challenges for the witness of the churches, Moscow (with LWF, WARC)
1992	Consultation on Christian Religious Education in Central and Eastern Europe Today and Tomorrow, Moscow
1993	WCC/CEC Dialogue Meeting on Peace in the Caucasus, Switzerland
1994	Promoting Peace in the Former Yugoslavia, Geneva
1995	Mission, Evangelism and Proselytism, St Sergius Lavra, Russia
1999	Churches and the Kosovo crisis consultation, Hungary
2000	WCC Central Committee Plenary on Europe, Potsdam
2002	WCC in Central & Eastern Europe Consultation, Minsk
2003	WCC Consultation on Ecumenical Cooperation in Central Asia

**Major WCC programmes in Europe (with starting date):**

1991	AIDROM / Romania Round Table Programme
1991	Christian Inter-church Diaconal Council of St Petersburg (Russia)
1992-97	Russia Round Table on Diakonia & Religious Education Programme St. Petersburg and Volgograd regional assistance programmes Academgorodok, Siberia programme
1993	Albania Round Table Programme
1993*	Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation
1993	Ecumenical Women's Solidarity Fund in Former Yugoslavia
1994	Georgia humanitarian aid and partnership programmes
1994-98	Czech Republic Round Table
1994	Poland Pilot Programme

## **WCC Regional Strategy in Central & Eastern Europe**

1995*	ACT Central Asia initiated
1995	Churches & Disaster Preparedness Training Programme (regional)
1996	Armenia Round Table programme
1996	Bulgaria partnership programme
1996	Slovakia Round Table programme
1997	CIS Sisterhood Programme
1997	Belarus Round Table programme
1999	Russia Partnership Programme
2000	Coordination Committee for Interchurch Aid in Ukraine
2000	South-East Europe Ecumenical Partnership Programme
2001	Georgia Christian Information Programme
2002	Moldova Ecumenical Partnership Programme

*\* denotes programme where WCC was involved but not leading the initiative.*

### **Other recent WCC programmes in Europe included:**

Samaritan Magazine: Diakonia in Eastern Europe  
Sisterhood / Women's Network CIS capacity building and networking  
Children of Chernobyl aid programme  
Religious Literature Fund in CIS  
Capacity building and training programme  
Information and networking programme  
Involvement in ACT emergency assistance programme

Further programme information is available on: [www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/europe](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/europe)

### **Appendix III**

#### **Overview of the WCC Eastern Europe Office**

##### **Context**

The political and economical changes in Central & Eastern Europe in 1989-1990 dramatically influenced the social stability of the societies. After decades of persecution or forced marginalisation, churches in the region found themselves under enormous pressure to be active actors in civil society, and to provide social assistance, in most cases without experience people, resources, or adequate infrastructure.

In this situation WCC, with related church agencies, initiated a consultancy in 1991, within WCC Unit IV Europe Desk, Geneva. In the period of 1991-1994 WCC Europe Desk and related agencies developed accompaniment and assistance to churches in their social activities and reorganization in almost all countries in the region (See Appendix I for list of major programmes since the establishment of the consultancy). In 1994, the office moved to Bialystok, Poland and serves as a programme office of the WCC Europe Desk. The WCC Eastern Europe Office has developed its professional capacity to a significant extent over recent years, but there is a felt need for a stronger policy direction in the region.

##### **Aim and objectives of the WCC Eastern Europe Office**

The WCC Eastern Europe Office, (we have more staff), accompany and assist churches and related partners in the region in developing effective and community-based diaconal responses to social need through the development of appropriate social infrastructure, capacity-building of personnel, and networking of local initiatives. The office works closely with church and other ecumenical partners in the region. The diaconal mandate of the office is inherited from WCC Unit IV, and is a reflection of the interest of development agency donors which finance 100% of the budget.

*The current specific objectives of the WCC EEO are:*

- To assist member churches in the region in the design and preparation of diaconal programmes;
- To establish and develop ongoing forms of community-based diaconal work, most suitable for the needs and priorities of the local partners;
- To call and administer Round Table and related meetings;
- To administer other Special Programmes of the WCC in the region;
- To foster capacity building and human-resource development programmes with the churches in the region;
- To promote positive inter-church relations, and a better understanding of the ecumenical movement and organizations.

##### **Geographical area of responsibility**

The WCC Eastern Europe office is based in Poland. The office works primarily in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and (ex-Soviet) Central Asia and administers some projects in Poland. WCC EEO staff are working under supervision of the Geneva-based staff of the WCC Diakonia & Solidarity Team's Europe Desk.

##### **Legal and programmatic status**

WCC Eastern Europe Office has the legal status of a 'Foreign Legal Person on the territory of the Republic of Poland'. This means that the WCC EEO does not need any specific registration in Poland and can work according to WCC status and registration in Switzerland.