

Submission to the Welsh Affairs Committee by the Welsh Churches' Working Party on Wales and Europe

Executive summary

This submission encourages both the UK and Welsh Governments to focus on two specific areas of concern for the Churches: firstly, the relationships of the UK with European nations and states following Brexit and, secondly, expressing Christian perspectives on key issues that should be addressed in shaping society in the UK and in Wales during and following Brexit negotiations. The submission identifies five policy areas for consideration:

- *Rights and opportunities*
 - *Minority communities*
 - *Agriculture and the environment*
 - *Relationships with other nations and states*
 - *The democratic process*
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1. This submission is being made by the Churches' Working Party set up in collaboration with Cytûn (Churches Together in Wales), following a resolution by the Union of Welsh Independents, which convenes the Working Party. Representatives of Cytûn member churches and associated organisations seek to offer a Christian perspective on the core issues to be addressed within Wales and the UK following the referendum on UK membership of the European Union.
2. Prior to starting formal negotiations under Article 50, we believe that the elected governments of the UK should seek agreement on the fundamental aims of the negotiation. What follows is our suggestion for a statement of such aims. We believe that the Welsh Government and the other devolved administrations should be part of the negotiations following the triggering of Article 50. In this process, the centrality of European legislation as a basis for legislative aspects of devolution should not be overlooked.
3. **Relationships with European states and nations following Brexit**
The UK having decided to leave the EU, the Christian Churches in Wales represented on this Working Group believe that the first question to be addressed is : what kind of relationship with Europe do we as the people of Wales seek? The referendum vote does not mean that we cease to be inhabitants of the European continent or members of the European family.
4. We believe that HM Government and the Welsh Government should seek a relationship with Europe that continues to regard Europe as 'our common home, that builds on the past and looks to the future with renewed hope'. Governments and Churches in Europe should work together 'to step up efforts in making such Christian virtues as respect for others, solidarity, [mutual service] and building up community more visible in public life'.¹ We believe that there should be no compromise on these principles, especially in view of the hatred, enmity and war that has characterized the history of Europe during the last century. Therefore, we believe that future negotiations should ensure that the sovereignty of states and the interdependence of peoples and nations should be given equal emphasis as principles to be upheld and balanced.
5. In its reflection on 'our common European home' the Basel Assembly of the Conference of European Churches in 1989, referred to principles that should, we believe, remain at the core of our relationships within Europe:
 - 5.1. the equality of all who live in Europe, whether strong or weak;
 - 5.2. recognition of such values as freedom, justice, tolerance, solidarity, participation;
 - 5.3. a positive attitude towards adherents of different religions, cultures and world views;
 - 5.4. the promotion of dialogue instead of resorting to resolving conflicts through violence.
6. **Key policy areas to be addressed**
In applying these general principles to our future European relationships and our national priorities we believe that a number of key policy areas should be addressed:

¹ Conference of European Churches, Letter to the Churches, June 2016.

7. Rights and opportunities

- 7.1. Offering swift reassurance to EU citizens whose status is currently uncertain.
- 7.2. Protecting the status and rights of vulnerable and disabled people, the elderly and children.
- 7.3. Ensuring that young people have appropriate educational and employment opportunities during the period of greater economic uncertainty that is ahead, including continued participation in programmes such as Horizon 2020.
- 7.4. Being welcoming to the stranger and the poor among us, including continued participation in EU and Europe-wide programmes of resettlement of refugees.
- 7.5. Protecting individual and workers' rights, ensuring that rights currently guaranteed at EU level are written down into UK and/or Welsh law.

8. Minority communities

- 8.1. HM Government and the Welsh Government should continue to protect the rights of minority Communities, especially those who currently feel vulnerable as a result of hate crimes and abuse.
- 8.2. Both Governments should guarantee, through appropriate legislation and adequate funding, the nurture and encouragement of minority languages, particularly but not exclusively, the Welsh language. As Welsh will lose its co-official status at EU level when we leave the EU, we believe that an analogous status should be introduced at UK level for Welsh (and also for Scottish and Irish Gaelic)

9. Agriculture and the environment

- 9.1. We believe that, either through continued membership of the EEA and/or EFTA, or by writing down into UK and Welsh law, policies and funding should remain in place aimed at protecting the environment, tackling climate change and countering their effects on biodiversity.
- 9.2. We recognise that the current uncertainty is challenging for agriculture in Wales. We therefore encourage both Governments to ensure a transition from CAP funding that will not threaten future agricultural livelihoods, especially of small and medium sized family farms (including hill farms), which are vital to the Welsh rural economy and culture.

10. Relationships with other nations and states

- 10.1. As a fundamental basis for future relationships with countries both within and outside the European continent, we need to ensure that being good neighbours to other countries is a key aspect of our fiscal, economic, international development, and foreign policy.

11. The democratic process

- 11.1. The referendum on UK membership of the EU has itself raised two related issues with regard to the future of democracy within these nations and especially, for us, within Wales:
 - 11.1.1. the deep differences revealed by the result between different sectors of society and different geographical areas;
 - 11.1.2. aspects of our political culture and processes, and how to include the entire population within our politics (that is, addressing the so-called democratic deficit).

12. We are in process of inviting experts in the areas above to write short briefing papers on these topics. We hope to be able to share these, as appropriate, with HM Government and the Welsh Government, with a view to initiating a dialogue between churches and government on issues that we believe to be crucial to Wales during the coming years. We remain ready at any stage of the Committee's consultative process to elaborate on our concerns, either face to face or through further written evidence.