**Document No.** **13**

**Functions of the Governing Bodies**
**Towards a Working Group on Governance, Accountability and Staff Policy:**
*A discussion starter*

During its February 2008 meeting, the central committee took three decisions (at three different moments, addressing three inter-related and yet somehow different issues) with regard to the council's governance.

These decisions raise broader questions and challenges, which are simply listed here.

**1.    Recommendations of the central committee**

**1.1. Functions of the governing bodies**

> *"To receive document* Gen 07 – 'Functions of the governing bodies'*, and to forward the comments to the executive committee for further deliberation. Additionally, the entire document will be acted upon in the next central committee meeting." (cf. CC February 2008/Nominations Committee Report)*

There were no explicit comments to the document (both prior to the central committee, when it was shared during the consensus training, and during the central committee, when it was submitted to the plenary). However, the following concerns were expressed at different instances and may need to be addressed at a level that goes beyond the "clarifications" offered by Doc Gen 07:

   a) More precision is needed with regard to the division of labor, role and authority of the executive and central committees (there are already some pending amendments on which the central committee did not take action)[1].
   b) More transparency is needed with regard to the division of labor between the programme sub-committee of the executive committee and the programme committee of the central committee.
   c) More clarity is needed with regard to the function and role of the programme committee itself (a matter on the agenda of the programme committee, as there have been various difficulties faced during the two first meetings of the committee).[2]
   d) The flow (of information, conceptual input, recommendations, decisions) between consultative bodies and the programme committee will also have to be made clearer.
   e) The distribution of tasks between the programme and the policy reference committees needs particular attention (particularly since the mandate of the policy reference committee is not spelled out in the rules).
   f) The mandate and role of the nominations committee of the central committee, as spelled out in the Rules does not seem to correspond to the real functions of the committee.[3]

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[1] cf. CC February 2008, Doc Gen 06.
[2] cf. Report of the meeting of the Core Group of the Programme Committee and the Leadership of the Finance Committee, Geneva, May 2008.
[3] cf Constitution and Rules of the WCC, Rule VII.

g) The mandate and role of the finance committee of the central committee seems to be gradually expanded (particularly with the inclusion of staff policy matters) so as to become de facto a "management" committee.[4]

## 1.2. Frequency of CC meetings

> *"The central committee instructs the executive committee to consider the feasibility of a return to annual meetings of central committee, and if that proves inappropriate, to develop a reporting cycle for programmes, committees and commissions that is designed fully to match the 18 month pattern." (cf. CC February 2008/Programme Committee Report)*

The Rules clearly state that the central committee "shall ordinarily meet once every year".[5] The eighteen-month cycle was adopted by the central committee because of financial considerations.[6]

If a return to the annual meetings proves impossible (again for financial reasons), it could be argued that the elaboration of a reporting cycle, suggested by this recommendation as an alternative solution, cannot solve a major difficulty: indeed, some of the above-mentioned underlying tensions (e.g. between the executive and central committees, or between the programme sub-committee of the executive committee and the programme committee of the central committee) have mostly their origins in the changing rhythm of central committee meetings, particularly as decisions have to be prepared and taken at different moments of the year by different governing bodies.

Certainly, reporting in between executive committee meetings (regularly done by the general secretary) can keep central committee informed. The real issue however is **who** makes the decisions (particularly on programme policy) and **when** these decision are taken (with regard not only to the planning cycle, but also the requirements of the ecumenical partners for funding requests and reporting).

Therefore, as was already underlined, more clarity about "the division of labor, role and authority" of each body and transparent ways of delegation from one body to another might be needed.

## 1.3 Review of governance, accountability and staff policy

> *"The central committee instructs the executive committee to create a working group on governance, accountability and staff policy" (CC February 2008/Closed session's decision, 18 February 2008.)*

The decision was taken in a certain moment in the life of the institution and obviously aims at addressing issues that have surfaced during and around the circumstances of this particular moment. It does not explicitly refer to a revision of the Rules, neither does it give any indication about the range of the expected review.

Looking back, it could be argued that from Canberra to Harare (1991-1998) the emphasis was on incorporating into the Constitution and Rules of the WCC the outcome of the CUV (mainly article 3), while from Harare to Porto Alegre (1998-2006) the emphasis was on incorporating the findings of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC (particularly on membership; consensus decision making; the Permanent Committee on

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[4] Cf. Constitution and Rules of the WCC, Rule XI.
[5] Rule VI.3. a)
[6] Cf. Minutes of the central committee, 2001, p. 143.

Consensus and Collaboration).  There were no major modifications with regard to the governance structures.[7]


## 2.  Suggestions from ecumenical partners

### 2.1. Two questions addressed to the Council

The constitution of a working group on governance could also offer the occasion to deal with fundamental questions raised by ecumenical partners, particularly in the framework of the reflection process on *ecumenism in the 21st century* and the role of the WCC within the broader ecumenical movement. . Two of these questions might be:

i.    Could membership/participation in the governing bodies of the WCC be extended beyond representation of member churches? The question refers to ecumenical organizations largely constituted by the member churches of the Council (e.g. Christian World Communions).

ii.   Could the governing bodies of the WCC be envisaged smaller, more flexible, adapted to the need of a modern management? What lessons could be learned from ecumenical partners who have abandoned large, costly, and somehow "outdated" governance structures (e.g. the Specialized Ministries)?

One of the major tasks of the working group would be to identify such questions and challenges and address them properly.

### 2.2. A proposal from ecumenical partners

During the WCC Round Table (Geneva, May 2008) the leadership and representatives of the Specialized Ministries formulated the proposal that the working group on governance should also include representatives of the partners. Their argument is quite simple: since most of the recently established consultative bodies (e.g. Ecumenism in the 21st Century, Assembly Discernment Committee, etc.) include representatives of partner ecumenical organizations, the working group on governance should follow the same pattern.

The response to this proposal will emerge as the executive committee will be discussing the character of the working group, If the latter will be composed exclusively of members of governing bodies, some ways of consultation with partners (including the Specialized Ministries) might be explored. If it will have an advisory character and , therefore, a broader membership, an active participation of the Specialized Ministries might be considered.

### 3. Suggested actions

The executive committee:

i.    *To define the nature and range of the task to be entrusted to the working group and prepare its terms of reference accordingly;*
ii.   *To make preliminary proposals for the agenda and time-lines of the working group;*
iii.  *To appoint the membership of the working group.*

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[7] There have been central committee documents on staffing policy (in 1987 and in 1992), but they have not been incorporated into the Rules. cf. Minutes of the central committee meetings in 1987 and 1992.