

3. November 2016

Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, chair of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany

press conference on 3.11.16 in Geneva

1. The European Reformation Roadmap is a strong symbol of cooperation in Europe. It is the right idea for Europe – and I will say that to the EKD general synod, that begins next Sunday with solidarity in Europe as its main theme. We have to learn how to get over borders and barriers.

That is just what the European Roadmap does. It overcomes national borders and connects 68 way-stations in 19 European states. It overcomes denominational boundaries and links up 47 Protestant churches – Lutheran Reformed, United – and includes the Church of England, that is hosting events on 23 February 2017 in Cambridge. Generally the local programmes have been planned and organised ecumenically. Some invitations are even interfaith, e.g. in Stadthagen (in Lower Saxony) there will be an evening on peace between the religions on 29 November 2016.

2. The European Roadmap aims to highlight the roots of Reformation history. The Reformation did not just start out from Luther in Wittenberg, Huldrych Zwingli in Zürich or Jean Calvin here in Geneva. It is linked with many other strong figures at many different places: with Adam Weiss in Crailsheim. With Mattäus Zell in Strasbourg. With Tamás Nádasdy and János Sylvester in Savar. With King Christian III in Norway, with Henry VIII in England, with Gustav I Wasa in Sweden, to name but a few. And naturally women were also strong pioneers of the Reformation: above

all Katharina von Bora in Torgau and Katharina Zell in Strasbourg.

The Roadmap tour will put all these names on the map. And also symbolic places like Eisenach, with Wartburg castle, Bretten as the birthplace of Melancthon, Wildhaus, where Zwingli was born, Prague where Jan Hus lived and worked, or the towns where Imperial Diets were held: Speyer, Worms and Augsburg.

3. The way-stations also stand for the present significance of the Reformation. For example, Wuppertal – adjoining Barmen where the Confessing Church synod adopted the famous Barmen Declaration in 1934. Or Wolfsburg – a town completely without a Reformation history – but present with the topic of work and the theme “Humans as co-creators. Discovering work afresh“. Or Bremen, Wilhelmshaven and Emden with the topic “Fleeing and arriving – 500 years of Reformation – 500 years of migration“. And last but not least, Geneva as the “ecumenical capital“.

4. The European Roadmap is a strong symbol. Its show-truck (‘storymobile’) will link up Turku in the North and Dublin in the West, goes as far as Rome in the South and Riga in the East. Each of the 68 way-stations will pass on its own narratives – as many as 15 per stopover! This will grow into a whole book, telling how much the Reformation has shaped the faith and lives of many people to this day.

And the storymobile, crossing into 19 countries, will demonstrate that the Reformation is a “world citizen”.

We are also celebrating the Reformation anniversary this year because we know that much more unites than divides us. We understand diversity, across all denominational, national or cultural borders, as enriching – provided it is not exclusive.

In this spirit, the European churches can become sponsors of a united Europe in this anniversary year. A Europe that shows solidarity beyond its own borders.