



Evangelische Kirche
in Deutschland



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Summary
of the Joint Statement “Strengthening Trust in Democracy”
of the German Bishops’ Conference and the Council of the Evangelical Church in
Germany

The German Bishops’ Conference and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) published the Joint Statement “Strengthening Trust in Democracy” on 11 April 2019. It is based on and follows the Joint Statement “Democracy requires Virtues” published in 2006.

In Germany and other European countries, political tendencies and actors can increasingly be observed that attack established structures and conjure up a supposedly homogeneous will of the people against democratic processes and pluralistic conflict resolution paths. On the one hand, this approach with its simple solutions is to be problematized, on the other hand it shows that it is necessary to address the underlying causes and to further develop the democratic order in view of these challenges.

Intention of the Joint Statement

The text addresses the danger of a crisis of trust in democracy in Germany and Europe and is directed against the strengthening of populist and anti-democratic forces. The aim of the text is to address perceived problems and at the same time to make clear that the Churches are prepared to participate in finding solutions to these challenges. The self-conception of the Churches, which also includes the mandate to engage themselves in and for society, is the driving force behind the reflections on politically necessary action set out in the Joint Statement.

The two Churches see themselves as part of democratic society. They expressly acknowledge their shared responsibility for democracy as a political form of freedom: Commitment based on Christian faith strengthens democracy.

In the Joint Statement four significant changes, which happened in the last one to two decades, are exemplarily taken into consideration:

- the challenges of globalization and its consequences for economy and ecology,
- the relationship between economic inequality and democratic equality,
- the tasks arising from migration and integration, and
- the change, above all in public communication, due to increasing digitalization in all areas of life.

In view of these challenges to democratic consensus in politics and society, the Joint Statement opens up possibilities for political action.

The two Churches and democracy

The Churches hold the view that the democratic and social state under the rule of law, and thus liberal democracy, may not represent a perfect order. However, it has proved to be the best possible political order, both theoretically and practically, with regard to living together in this world, because it is capable of learning and criticism. The Churches have not always seen it that way. It has taken time until they have taken the freedom impulse of the Gospel seriously, also in its political consequences. All the more reason for the Churches today to promote democratic commitment.

The Churches recall the insight that the democratic constitutional state lives from the fact that its citizens adhere to written and unwritten prerequisites of a democratic community – this has already been formulated in the previous statement "Democracy Requires Virtues". Democracy depends on the fundamental trust of its citizens in democratic structures, processes and institutions. In this context, the Churches aim to contribute to (re)strengthening this trust. They do this against the particular background of the relevant foundations of the Christian faith: that all human beings as creatures of God are equal in dignity and rights, that solidarity with the weak is to be practiced and that human beings are not to be committed only to what is given but that they may develop further.

Democratic morality as a central concept

A central concept of the Joint Statement with regard to building and maintaining trust is "democratic morality". The "good moral standards of democracy" include, in particular, fairness, respect for one another, recognition of democratic rules, the courage to engage in controversy, but also willingness to compromise, acceptance of majority decisions, assumption of individual responsibility, protection of minorities, and orientation towards the common good. An essential prerequisite of trust, in spite of all that separates us, is a living awareness of what we have in common and of mutual responsibility in society. This requires educational processes in order to practice participation in the democratic conflict of opinions and the sense of helping to shape the community.

Strengthening of multilateralism and of the European Union

Globalization requires a political design with an ethical orientation towards order as a normative basis. The realization of a global regulatory policy will only be possible within the framework of multilateral institutions and processes. With regard to this ethical orientation towards order, the Churches with their global networks consider themselves to have a special responsibility. They have long understood Christian social ethics and church social doctrine in the sense of global order ethics, whose vanishing point is not only particular, national interests, but the common good of the whole world. Therefore the Churches unequivocally stand up for the system of an ordered multilateralism.

This applies not least to the European Union (EU), whose democratic legitimacy must be guaranteed and communicated in an understandable way. The Churches are concerned that people are losing trust in the EU. The idea that Europe is a project of peace, solidarity and reconciliation, not only as a union of states or corporations, but also as a union of citizens, must resurface and become more perceptible to the people. Multilateral structures must be strengthened in order to adapt the mechanisms of democratic representation to the needs of intergovernmental and supranational cooperation.

Economic (in)equality and democratic equality

The "priority option for the poor" is a social-ethical principle for the Churches. The gap between "poor" and "rich" is still large and the gains in prosperity are distributed unequally. There is a close connection between making a decent living and political participation. Democracy as the system of political equality depends on a complementary system of socio-economic equilibrium, which also corresponds to the idea of the social market economy.

We are dealing with the fair participation of responsible citizens in the socio-economic as well as in the political and cultural sense, and under the conditions of globalization and digitalization. In order to secure trust, we have the obligation to ensure a social balance and comprehensive social participation for all.

Migration and integration

The Churches recognize the legitimacy and necessity of differentiating between refugee protection and immigration. This includes determining, on the basis of appropriate democratic decision-making, under which conditions it is possible for people to settle permanently in Germany. In this context, one thing has to be clear: Integration is a mutual challenge, because the free, democratic state depends on a corresponding attitude of all people. The following points are indispensable: equal respect for every human being, regardless of gender and sexual orientation, tolerance towards those who think differently, appreciation of political debate as a means of solving problems and many others.

The Churches are committed to universal human rights and oppose all forms of discrimination, exclusion and violence. Against the background of German history and its own church history, this applies in a special way to all forms of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism as well as to all other forms of religious discrimination and racism.

Digital Change

Democratic participation today can hardly be imagined without the use of digital media. First of all, the state has to provide the framework conditions for the development of an infrastructure, to create opportunities for digital participation and to adapt rules to the requirements of communication that is becoming increasingly digital.

In the digital age, democracy is dependent on media ethics and media education. Particularly important for democratic discourse in the digital area are: the duty of care in dealing with fake facts, the critical reflection of strong valuations and emotionalizations in political debate as well as attention to the highly ambivalent mobilization potential of social networks.