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CSC Update on European Affairs

TOPICS COVERED:

Climate change, intercultural dialogue, European integration, migration, upcoming CSC events.

Climate Change

Commission unveils the climate action and renewable energy package

In March 2008, EU leaders endorsed the European Commission proposals to cut CO₂ emissions by at least 20% by 2020 (30% if global targets can be agreed on) and to set a binding 20% target for the use of renewable energy sources. The overall goal is to cap global temperature increases at 2°C.

Following this principal decision, the European Commission put forward on 23 January 2008 a far-reaching package of proposals with the aim to deliver on the Union's ambitious commitments.

The proposed package includes several concrete proposals for action:

An improved emissions trading system (ETS) will cover more emissions and will allow firms in one EU country to buy allowances in any other. Furthermore, the trading scheme will gradually cover extended number of industrial sectors.

For those economic sectors not covered by the ETS such as agriculture, waste, buildings and transport, EU Member States received binding national emissions targets, with richer countries receiving stricter targets than poorer ones. The targets reflect each country's individual needs and its potential. Twelve of the less economically developed

Member States, including almost all the countries that joined in or since 2004, are actually permitted to increase their greenhouse gas emissions.

The package prescribes legally binding and enforceable targets for increasing the share of renewables in the energy mix. The proposal takes into consideration level of economic development as well as previous efforts of respective EU Member States. However, even those countries, which already achieved relatively high shares of renewable energy, have to further increase their targets.

The most controversial element in the package concerns the target of 10% use of biofuels in transport. Environmental groups maintain that biofuels increase greenhouse gas emissions and undermine food security in the developing world.

The package also calls on the Member States to save 20% of energy consumption by 2020 through energy efficiency.

Finally, the package seeks to promote new rules on the development and safe use of carbon capture and storage, a set of technologies that allows the carbon dioxide emitted by industrial processes to be captured and stored underground where it cannot contribute to global warming as well as on environmental subsidies.

Now unveiled, the Commission proposal must gain the approval of the European Parliament and the EU Member States. The Environmental Affairs Council of 3 March will provide the first guidelines for the discussion, which the Commission together with the Slovenian and French EU Presidencies seek to conclude by a first reading agreement by the end of this year.

In an address to the European Parliament introducing these initiatives, President José Manuel Barroso called the package "the most far-reaching set of legislative proposals to be made by the European Commission for many years." "[Europe] will show how a modern economy can be designed to meet the challenge. This is sustainable development in action," he said.

Website of the climate action and renewable energy package:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/focus/energy-package-2008/index_en.htm

Follow the European Parliament discussions on the theme at:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/documents_presse_par_theme_page/911/default_en.htm

Intercultural Dialogue

Europe enters into intercultural dialogue

The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 was given an official launch in a conference organised by the Slovenian EU Presidency in Ljubljana on 7-8 January.

The event, which was open to public, gathered 250 participants from national ministries, NGOs and cultural institutions such as European music and theatre associations, radio and TV stations and newspapers. Religion did not feature in the programme and, except for the final reception where the Presidency had invited Slovenian religious communities, the two Church and Society Commission (CSC) representatives were the only participants from the side of churches.

The conference was opened, amongst other speakers, by the European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, Ján Figel who quoted Jean Monet in saying that the aim of European integration was to not to unite states but people. Figel urged Europeans to move beyond multicultural societies where different cultures live in parallel realities and to understand integration as an equal access to participation instead of assimilation or absorption. He also stressed – and this point was repeated by several speakers – that knowing one's own culture paves the way to engaging with people from different cultures. Figel went on promising that the EU would continue to invest into intercultural dialogue in the coming years and highlighted the importance of civil society in this work. Odile Quintin, the Director General of the DG Education later told the conference that the EU has commissioned a study "Sharing Diversity" which looks at the national approaches to intercultural dialogue.

During the conference discussions were held on questions such as can a nation state continue to absorb new cultural influences as the arts have done historically? Can separate ethnically-based cultures be respected, facilitated and subsidised without creating a fragmented and divided society? How to overcome mental borders now as physical borders between the EU Member States are being lifted? What is the role of media in this process?

The conference was concluded with a festive evening which was attended by the Slovenian President Danilo Türk and the Prime Minister Janez Janša, the President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering and the college of European Commissioners. In this occasion references were made to the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. Parliament President Pöttering underlined the importance of the peaceful coexistence of cultures and religions. He reminded the conference that dialogue demands respect for the dignity, religious convictions and views of every partner. As examples of European Parliament's efforts to promote intercultural dialogue, Pöttering told about the Parliament's plans to invite senior political and religious leaders from all over the world to address the Parliament plenary as well as on its intention to host the annual summit of European religious leaders.

Speeches of Commissioner Figel and President Pöttering as well as further information on the event is available at:

http://www.mk.gov.si/en/evropsko_letno_medkulturnega_dialoga/opening_event/

The official website of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue:

<http://www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu/>

European Integration

Ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty is underway

Hungary was the first EU country to ratify the Treaty of Lisbon in a parliamentary vote on 17 December. Since then the Treaty has been ratified by Slovenia, Malta and Romania. Ireland as the only country to hold a referendum is intending to call the vote before the summer. Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern has appealed to his countrymen and women by stressing the Treaty to safeguard Ireland's future economic stability and growth.

Besides the ratification process, the focus on the Treaty front is now on preparing the practical and technical implementation of the foreseen reforms.

The final text of the Treaty of Lisbon is available at:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.asp?id=1317&lang=en&mode=g>

CSC took stock of the new Treaty in a briefing published in November 2007.

<http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/Update12Briefing4.pdf>

Migration

CCME and CEC express concern on return directive towards EU institutions

The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and two Roman Catholic organisations in a letter of 8th January to the Presidents of EU institutions expressed their concerns about recent developments concerning the European Commission's proposal for a "Directive on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals" (Return Directive).

The four organisations, CCME, CEC, Caritas Europa and the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community, are particularly worried about two elements included in the draft report of the European Parliament on the proposed Return Directive: the possibility for Member States to keep people detained for up to 18

months on the basis of an administrative decision, and the establishment of a re-entry ban of 5 years.

The European Parliament's draft report which was approved by the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) in September, includes the possibility to allow Member States to detain people for up to 18 months pending their forced removal from the territory. To the Christian organisations such a measure is unacceptable and should never be sanctioned by European Community Law. Studies have shown that longer detentions are expensive, unnecessary and inhumane methods that do not directly lead to more effective removals.

Another measure of concern included in the draft directive, and retained by the LIBE Committee, is the proposal of applying a re-entry ban of 5 years. A re-entry ban may affect the *non-refoulement* principle of the UN Refugee Convention. This principle guarantees that a person would not be sent back into a possible situation of persecution or risk. Closing the EU border for 5 years excludes any chance to find refuge in Europe and might push desperate people to request the 'services' of smugglers and traffickers in human beings.

The four organisations urge the European institutions to delete provisions for a re-entry ban from the Return Directive, as well as to limit rather than expand the use of detention in removal procedures in EU legislation.

Churches encourage European institutions: put human rights at the heart of anti-trafficking policies

CCME on 1 February 2008 welcomed the entry into force of the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS N° 197). CCME together with the CSC-CEC and Caritas Europe followed the drafting of the Convention. In July 2004 the three organisations provided joint input to the negotiations on the Convention. After the adoption of the Convention in May 2005, CCME with its Christian partner organisations mobilised churches across Europe so that they would urge their national governments and parliaments to sign and ratify the Convention. Efforts of the Christian organisations contributed to the ratification of the Convention by the 10th Council of Europe Member State in October 2007, which allowed the Convention to enter into force.

On this occasion, CCME in a coalition with other networks active against trafficking in human beings reiterated its appeal to the European Commission to sign and ratify the Convention. In a letter to the European Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security Franco Frattini, the eight organisations underline that "by addressing the issue of human trafficking in the wider European human rights framework, the EU will ensure greater coherence and legitimacy for its anti-trafficking policy and therefore for its human rights policy as a whole"

Further information on the Convention available at:

http://www.coe.int/t/DG2/TRAFFICKING/campaign/default_en.asp

The joint letter to European Commission:

<http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/index.html>.

Forthcoming events

7th Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network

The European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) will organise from 24 to 28 September 2008 its 7th Assembly under the title 'The true challenge of climate change.' Following the invitation of the Federation of the Protestant Churches in Italy, the Assembly will take place in the "Sacro Cuore" conference centre, near to Milano.

The 7th ECEN Assembly will in its scope and content follow the outcomes of the previous Assembly 'Living in the new energy era' organised in Sweden in September 2006. The Assembly will also take stock of the Third European Ecumenical Assembly, held in Sibiu in September 2007, in which environmental topics played a significant role.

The aims of the Assembly are:

- to identify the link between the theme of the Assembly and the life of the churches
- to offer churches in Europe guidance in dealing with the challenge of climate change
- to create space for sharing of practical examples of the churches' work on climate change
- to deepen thematic work in the network

Along with reflections on developments in church and ecumenical life, the Assembly will pay attention to the developments on the international political scene, where the challenge of climate change is presented with increasing urgency. Outcomes of the recent UN meeting in Bali, as well as the latest EU initiatives, will provide the Assembly its socio-political context.

More information about the Assembly will soon be available at www.ecen.org

Conference on Churches and Corporate Social Responsibility: the use of churches' own financial resources

Corporate Social Responsibility has become a major concern in recent years. The issue of how churches best use their own financial resources (such as ethical forms of

investments for pensions) will be explored in a conference to be held in Brussels on 6-7 May. This conference will be jointly organised by the Church and Society Commission of CEC, Oikocredit and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland. More details are available from Matthew Ross, email: mzr@cec-kek.be.

Seminar on Employment and the Churches in Europe, with EU Commissioners Figel and Spidla, 27-29 February 2008 Brussels

On 27-29 February 2008, the Church and Society Commission of CEC together with the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and the European Contact Group (ECG) will hold a consultation on employment and the churches in Europe. The consultation will include a Dialogue Seminar on 28 February with the European Commission, which will be co-organised with COMECE and the Bureau of European Policy Advisors. The main speakers of the Dialogue Seminar are Mr Vladimir Spidla, the Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, and Mr Ján Figel, the Commissioner for Education and Culture.

Other future CSC consultations

In addition to the above-mentioned events, CSC will in the course of 2008 organise a series of consultations on different themes linked to its work programme. The meeting with churches from the countries holding the upcoming EU Presidencies will take place in Sweden on 26-27 May. A consultation focusing on religion in the public sphere has been scheduled for October 2008. A brainstorming meeting on Ethics, Science and Technology as well as two separate consultations on globalisation are also planned for the year 2008. Furthermore, CSC in cooperation with COMECE and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung will contribute to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 by organising four seminars on Islam, Christianity and Europe, which will be targeted for the members of the European Parliament and for EU civil servants. The seminars will be held in Brussels in April, May, June and September.



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The Church and Society Commission (CSC) is one of the commissions of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). The CSC links CEC's 125 member churches from all over Europe and its associated organisations with the European Union's institutions, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, NATO and the UN (on European matters). It engages its member churches and associate organizations in studies and projects relevant to church and society and thus supports and strengthens the common witness of European churches vis-à-vis the European Institutions and in the respective European societies.

This publication informs CEC members on European developments and related CSC activities. Members are welcome to use this publication as a channel to inform on their respective work. For comments or further information on the issues as well as to subscribe or unsubscribe, please contact csc@cec-kek.be. CSC Updates on European Affairs are also available on the CEC website at: <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/EuropeUpdates.shtml>