



Conference of European Churches
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CSC Update on European Affairs

TOPICS COVERED:

Churches meet with Slovenian EU Presidency, Dialogue seminar on flexicurity, CSC statements on Europe's social reality and on active inclusion, EU Fundamental Rights Agency, CSC work on human rights, intercultural dialogue, European integration, climate change, migration, upcoming CSC events.

Slovenian EU Presidency

European Churches meet Slovenian EU Presidency

On 19 February 2008, a delegation of European and Slovenian churches was received by the Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa. Due to the events around the declaration of independence of Kosovo, issues of peace, stability and reconciliation in the Western Balkans figured high on the agenda. Both the Slovenian Prime Minister and the churches' representatives expressed their commitment to foster peace and reconciliation for the whole of the Balkan region. The churches stressed the need for the EU to stay committed to the ultimate aim of a full EU membership for the states in the Western Balkans and to ensure that the foreseen EU Defence and Security Mission in Kosovo will contribute to enhancing human rights. This includes the protection of minorities and protection and free access to holy sites and sites of worship.

In connection with the ongoing EU work to develop benchmarks for the accession talks with Turkey in the area of judiciary and fundamental rights, the churches underlined the importance of full implementation of religious freedom.

The church representatives handed over to the Prime Minister their recent statements with regard to the revision of the European social agenda. "Social coherence and adequate social protection are for the churches integral elements of a successful and

sustainable Lisbon Strategy,” Rev Rüdiger Noll and Mgr Noel Treanor emphasized on behalf of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC/CEC) and the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE).

With regard to issues related to migration and asylum, the churches invited the EU Presidency to revisit the proposal for the return directive (see the article on migration in this number) and encouraged EU Member States to join the Convention on Trafficking in Human Beings of the Council of Europe and to find lasting solutions with regard to Iraqi refugees.

Read the full press release at: <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/pr-cq0807e.shtml>

Employment and Social Affairs

Churches encourage the European Union to a much broader approach in employment policies

On the eve of the meeting of the Employment Ministers, on 28 February, representatives and experts of the churches in Europe met with the EU institutions and social partners to discuss the modernisation of European employment policies.

Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities explained that the so-called “flexicurity” approach gives opportunity to protect workers on the labour market, to promote equal work opportunities between men and women, to strengthen family life and to fight against poverty. Špidla underlined that the main aim of flexicurity is not merely to protect workers against precarious situations but to protect human dignity. Flexicurity is focused more on society than on the labour market.

The EU Commissioner for Education and Culture, Ján Figel, stressed that education can contribute in making the flexicurity initiative successful in all the countries and regions of the EU.

In their response, the churches stressed the need for a much broader approach in European employment policies than currently practiced. They voiced their concern about the increasing segmentation of the labour market, with more and more precarious employment situations and the growing marginalisation of specific groups such as long-term unemployed, less skilled people or people with a migration background.

The seminar was co-organised by the European Commission, CSC and COMECE. These Dialogue Seminars have a longstanding tradition in the cooperation between the European Commission and the churches in Europe. Since their beginning in the early 1990s, they have proved to be a significant discussion forum for matters of common concern. They represent an important element of the open, transparent and regular dialogue between the European Commission and the churches in Europe.

Read the full press release of the Dialogue Seminar at: <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/pr-cq0810e.shtml>

CSC issues two substantial statements on EU social policy

In February CSC, together with its partner organisations, responded to two European Commission consultations related to social issues. The joint CSC-CCME-Eurodiaconia response to “Europe’s Social Reality” stock-taking consultation and to the Commission Communication “Toward a new social vision” provides an excellent overview on topical discussions concerning Europe’s social reality and the churches’ perspectives on them.

Together with CCME, CSC also gave its input to a consultation following the publication of a Commission Communication: “Modernising social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion: taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market”.

Both documents are attached to this Europe Update.

Call for members to provide position papers on family issues

CSC is mapping member churches’ views on family issues in order to prepare future work on the theme. CEC member churches and associated organisations are welcome to send their respective position papers to Dieter Heidtmann, dht@cec-kek.be.

Human Rights

EU Human Rights Agency takes off

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) became the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) on 1 March 2007 (See Update N° 5). On 28 February 2008, the Justice and Home Affairs Council, after consulting the European Parliament, decided on both the Agency’s Multi-Annual Framework (MAF) and the Agreement on cooperation between FRA and the Council of Europe (CoE). The agreement between the Agency and CoE establishes regular meetings between both bodies, arranges the exchange of information, and provides for coordination of activities in order to avoid duplication of work.

Multi-Annual Framework covers the first five years of FRA’s existence (2007-2012) and determines the thematic areas of the Agency’s work:

- racism, xenophobia and related intolerance;

- discrimination based on sex, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation and against persons belonging to minorities and any combination of these grounds (multiple discrimination);
- compensation of victims;
- the rights of the child, including the protection of children;
- asylum, immigration and integration of migrants;
- visa and border control;
- participation of the EU citizens in the Union's democratic functioning;
- information society and, in particular, respect for private life and protection of personal data; and
- access to efficient and independent justice.

FRA is not empowered to deal with individual complaints, but it can refer people to organisations in each Member State where individuals are given legal advice. These include the "National Equality Bodies" which, according to the EU Racial Equality Directive, provide independent assistance to the victims of discrimination, and the national human rights institutions available in many European countries in order to deal more widely with human rights issues and often also with individual cases.

In its meeting on 6-7 March 2008, the Management Board of the Agency appointed Danish Morten Kjaerum as FRA's first Director. Morten Kjaerum has 23 years of human rights experience and currently directs the Danish Institute for Human Rights. When interviewed by the EP Civil Liberties Committee, Kjaerum assessed FRA as a good instrument to strengthen human rights and explained that according to his vision the Agency should be "highly interactive" with the institutional and civil society networks. Both the Council and the Civil Liberties Committee selected Kjaerum as their first choice for the director. The other candidate was Dario Carminati from Italy.

The preparations in view of establishing a Fundamental Rights Forum as a cooperation platform between the Agency and civil society are under way. CSC is involved in the process.

Website of FRA: <http://fra.europa.eu/fra/index.php>

CSC Human Rights work gets fresh impetus

After some quiet time between the departure of the former CSC human rights officer Donatella Rostagno and the arrival of Elizabeta Kitanovic, CSC work in this area found fresh impetus. Among its first activities, the re-launched Working Group on Human Rights contributed to a Council of Europe (CoE) recommendation on human rights of members of the armed forces. The contribution expressed the churches' strong commitment to human rights in peace and in war time. Churches emphasized human rights education in armed forces and the right for conscientious objection to military service as essential components of human rights in the armed forces. CSC is present in

the CoE Group on Human Rights of Members of the Armed Forces (DH-DEV-FA), which is a subcommittee of the Steering Committee of Human Rights (CDDH).

CSC has taken a new active role in the work of the Brussels-based Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN). CSC takes part in HRDN working groups dealing with FRA, the cooperation with the European Parliament and the EU's human rights-related funding instrument: European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

Intercultural Dialogue

Latest developments concerning the CoE White Paper on ICD

The publication of the Council of Europe (CoE) White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue has already been postponed a couple of times. The second draft version is currently debated inside the organisation and requires the approval of all 47 Member States to be adopted. According to the latest plans, the CoE Committee of Ministers will decide on the paper at the beginning of May.

The White Paper is aimed at policy makers and practitioners at national, regional and local levels, to whom it will provide guidelines as well as analytical and methodological tools for the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

On 8 April 2008, the Committee of Ministers will hold a meeting on "Teaching religious and convictional facts". Around 60 participants from various organisations have been invited. CEC will be represented by four Orthodox and three Protestant/Anglican members.

That meeting will follow-up the San Marino conference on interreligious dialogue in April 2007 (see Europe Update N° 8). It is also the first of the "Council of Europe annual exchanges on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue". An innovative and experimental event, the exchange is part of the overall framework of action undertaken by CoE in the field of intercultural dialogue. The Council of Europe expects that the exchange will identify approaches and ideas which the participants can then apply in their own field of activity.

Climate Change

The Environmental Affairs Council of 3 March 2008 provided the first guidelines for the discussion on EU action on climate change following the publication of a package of proposals on 23 January (see Europe Update N° 14). The European Commission together with the Slovenian and French EU Presidencies seek to find an agreement on the package by a first reading agreement by the end of this year.
Environmental Council conclusions of 3 March 2008.

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Council_Conclusions/March/0303_ENV3.pdf

Please find an updated CSC Briefing on Climate Change at:
<http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CSCBriefingonClimateChangeMarch2008.pdf>

European Integration

Ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty continues

Since the last Update, the Treaty of Lisbon has seen the yes votes in France and in the European Parliament (EP). After the EP vote on 20 February, its President Hans-Gert Pöttering welcomed the result of the vote as "a clear expression of the desire for more democracy and a greater capacity of the Union to deliver."

In Belgium the process began with the approval of the Senate but due to the country's complex federal structure another 6 governing bodies will have to vote on the Treaty before it can be approved. Until today 5 out of 27 EU Member States (Hungary, Romania, Malta, Slovenia and France) have ratified the new legal basis of the Union.

In the UK, after a long debate on whether to hold a referendum on the Treaty, the House of Commons (the lower chamber of the British Parliament) rejected the proposal. The decision still has to be approved by the House of Lords, but this is unlikely to be a major hurdle.

CSC has published a revised briefing on the new Treaty. It is available at:
<http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CSCReportTreatyofLisbonMarch2008.pdf>

The final text of the Treaty of Lisbon is available at:
<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.asp?id=1317&lang=en&mode=g>

Migration

Churches reiterate their concern on return directive towards EU institutions

The last issue of the Europe Update informed about the joint CCME-CEC-COMECE-Caritas Europe statement concerning the proposal for a "Directive on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals" (Return Directive).

The letter was followed by a meeting between the President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering and churches on 20 February 2008. The church delegation, formed

by the General Secretary of CCME Doris Peschke, the President of CEC Jean-Arnold de Clermont and Bishop William Kenney who represented both COMECE and Caritas Europe, draw the President's attention to two main concerns. The draft directive foresees the possibility for Member States to keep people detained for up to 18 months on the basis of an administrative decision. It also suggests the establishment of a re-entry ban of 5 years. Churches consider both measures unacceptable.

For more details, see Europe Update N° 14.

Forthcoming events

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 will be investigated in a conference in Brussels on 6-7 May. The event will be jointly organised by the Church and Society Commission of CEC, Oikocredit and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland.

The conference will start with a theological reflection from a Protestant, a Catholic and an Orthodox perspective, linking faith and doctrines to the churches' concept of investing money. It will then turn to more practical questions: How can we be sure that an investment is socially responsible? What information is needed by church leadership to make informed decisions and what types of services, and at what costs, are available? Which specific instruments should the finance industry offer to optimise investment opportunities for church-related investors? Finally, the conference will learn about promising initiatives of 'Churches and Corporate engagement' and explore possibilities for further cooperation.

All CEC members have been invited to send two delegates, but more places should be available. The registration fee is 100 Euros. For details and registration contact Matthew Ross, e-mail: mzr@cec-kek.be. Registration closes on 4 April.

7th Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network

From 24 to 28 September 2008, the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) will hold its 7th Assembly under the title "The true challenge of climate change." Following the invitation of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, the Assembly will take place in the "Sacro Cuore" conference centre, near 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 guidance to the churches in Europe for 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 within 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 with its socio-political context.

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

Other future CSC consultations

In addition to the above-mentioned events, CSC will in the course of 2008 organise several other consultations on themes linked to its work programme. The meeting with churches from 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 November 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>