



Conference of European Churches
Conférence des Églises Européennes
Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen

N ° 18

5 / 2008

CSC Update on European Affairs

TOPICS COVERED:

Irish 'no' vote and the future of the Lisbon Treaty; French EU Presidency; Renewed Social Agenda; anti-discrimination directive; CSC relations with the EU Fundamental Rights Agency; CSC seminar on Islam, Christianity and Europe; Churches and EU Presidencies; bioethics; reduced TVA for restoration of worship places; migration; upcoming CSC events.

European Integration

Irish 'no' vote and the future of the Lisbon Treaty

The treaty reform process faced a major setback when Ireland as the only country to hold a referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon voted 'no' on 12 June 2008. The June European Council, held a few days later, took note of the situation and decided that more time is needed before any concrete decisions can be taken on further action. Member States agreed to continue the ratification process and to review the issue at the next Summit on 15 October. Possible compromises are already being informally canvassed, such as an Irish opt-out from the European Defence Agency and a guarantee that all countries would retain an EU Commissioner after 2014.

Why did the Irish electorate disapprove the Treaty?

Reasons for the Irish "no" vote are manifold. Besides lack of knowledge about the Lisbon Treaty (a decisive issue for 22% of no voters, according a Eurobarometer opinion poll), there was a general belief (76% of no voters) that the Treaty could be renegotiated to secure a "better" deal for Ireland. With regard to the content, there were worries that Ireland's competitive corporation tax rates may disappear and dissatisfaction concerning the loss of a permanent EU Commissioner (new Treaty foresees that all Member States

will lose the permanent Commissioner) with perceived loss of influence. Irish people were also concerned over the growing military role of the EU. Economic recession after many years of growth, combined with increasing unemployment also added to the anti-Treaty sentiment as well as general dissatisfaction with political elites, the former Taoiseach resigned following corruption allegations. Furthermore, the new Prime Minister Brian Cowen managed to discredit his own pro-Treaty campaign by telling the public that he had not read the document. In addition, the referendum was to some extent used to channel hostility to immigration. The 'no' voters also reacted to the comment of the French Foreign Minister prior to the referendum that Ireland would be punished for a no vote.

In general, a 'no' vote in a country, which is one of those EU members which has most benefited from the membership and which is the second biggest fan of the Union (73 % consider EU as a good thing in comparison to EU average of 52 %) is particularly striking. The main reasons not to vote - people did not understand the issues raised by the referendum, were too busy and were not informed about the issues at stake - and the main reason for no vote - people did not know enough about the Treaty - clearly suggest that the supporters of the Treaty - including the Church and Society Commission - have a major task ahead to make the EU more interesting for the citizens.

Consequences of the Irish referendum for the EU cooperation

All 27 EU Member States need to ratify the Lisbon Treaty before it can enter into force. Therefore, the initial plan to start its implementation at the beginning of 2009 is now unrealistic. The existing, legally cumbersome structure of the EU can continue working, but it is unlikely that accession of any new Member State will be considered until a final decision is taken about the Treaty of Lisbon. The most immediate problems caused by the impasse relate to the European elections and the election of the new Commission next year. The current Treaty limits the number of MEPs to 736, compared with 751 in the Treaty of Lisbon. It is now not clear how many deputies the next Parliament will seat. The current Treaty limits the number of Commissioners to two-thirds as from next year on whereas with the Treaty of Lisbon the change would have only taken place in 2014. The Irish fear of losing its own Commissioner is therefore being realised even faster than the new Treaty would have foreseen.

Ratification process

The approval of the Treaty by UK on the eve of the June Summit assured the Member States to continue with the ratification process. After Belgium, Cyprus, Spain and the Netherlands ratified the Treaty it is regarded as approved by 23 Member States even if there are six countries among the 23 where the very final approval depends on either presidential assent (Germany and Cyprus), royal assent (the Netherlands and Spain), or an approval of an overseas territory (Gibraltar-UK) or of an autonomous area (Åland Islands-Finland). In Germany the President has refused to sign the document until the country's Constitutional Court delivers a ruling on legal challenges. The next country to vote on the Treaty is Italy and the perspectives for a 'yes' vote are good. The Swedish vote scheduled to take place in late October seems to be more controversial. The

approval of the Treaty is most unclear in the Czech Republic which has indicated reluctance to continue ratification after the Irish no vote.

The consolidated text of the Lisbon Treaty:

http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/full_text/index_en.htm.

Presidency conclusions of the European Council 19-20 June 2008

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/101346.pdf

CSC Briefing (including assessment) on the Treaty of Lisbon (March 2008)

<http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CSCReportTreatyofLisbonMarch2008.pdf>

French EU Presidency

On 1 July 2008, France took the leadership of Europe with determination to move forward EU cooperation especially in the fields of migration, climate change, European defence and agriculture.

With regard to migration, French priorities are to launch a "European Immigration Pact", to promote legal migration of highly qualified workers through a blue card system and to fight against irregular migration.

In relation to climate change, the French will try to transform the political commitments agreed under the German EU Presidency in March 2007 into legal commitments

France also envisaged using the occasion, provided by the revision of the European Security Strategy, to boost EU military co-operation (including closer co-operation with NATO and higher degree of specialisation among the Member States). Now, however, France is likely to restrain its ambitions in order not to provoke any anti-EU sentiments in Ireland, a country which is attached to its neutrality in military affairs.

On agriculture, France wants to continue the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy although the aftermath of the Irish referendum is prone to overshadow these developments as well.

Programme of the French EU Presidency:

http://www.eu2008.fr/webdav/site/PFUE/shared/ProgrammePFUE/Programme_EN.pdf

18-month programme of the Council (the trio programme of France, the Czech Republic and Sweden): <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st11/st11249.en08.pdf>

Social Policy

European Commission launches “Renewed Social Agenda”

On 2 July 2008 the European Commission published its “Renewed Social Agenda: Opportunities, access and solidarity in 21st century Europe”. The agenda identifies globalisation, rapid technological development and demographic change as driving forces for societal change, which need “innovative policy responses”. It gives an overview on EU’s activities in seven priority areas: Children and youth, employment, mobility, health, poverty and social exclusion, anti-discrimination and gender equality and solidarity on the global scene. Furthermore, it describes the instruments the EU wants to use to promote social dialogue and social protection in its Member States.

To a large extent this Renewed Social Agenda provides a stocktaking of EU’s activities rather than new initiatives. The agenda stresses the “cross cutting and multidimensional” character of social policies and recognises “that economic and social actions ... are mutually reinforcing and complementary”. This is an understanding of social policies which had been promoted by the churches for a long time.

The Renewed Social Agenda focuses on “opportunities, access and solidarity”: “Creating opportunities ... means ensuring the chances for all to develop their own potentials.” “Providing access” is defined to “overcome inequalities in starting points”. Solidarity is described as commitment to give support to those who are disadvantaged. This theoretical foundation of the renewed agenda is very close to the concept of “participatory justice”, which had been introduced by the churches in the consultation process, which preceded the publication of the agenda. Unfortunately the renewed agenda does not reflect anymore the fourth element of non-materialistic factors for the well-being of people living in the EU, which was very much discussed in the consultation process.

The Renewed Agenda was published together with a number of related documents, including, proposals for directives on anti-discrimination and European works councils, communications and staff working documents on Roma inclusion, the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund and the promotion of decent work. The package also contains the first biennial report on the situation of social services of general interest in the EU.

Website of the Renewed Social Agenda:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=547&langId=en>

Contribution of CSC, CCME and Eurodiaconia in the consultation process:

http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CSC_CCMEresponseEuropesSocialReality.pdf

Overview on all documents of the social package:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/08/471&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Human Rights

Commission proposes a new directive on equal treatment irrespective of religion, disability, age or sexual orientation

Together with the renewed Social Agenda, the Commission published on 2 July 2008 a Proposal for a Council Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The aim of this proposal is to implement the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation *outside the labour market*. It sets out a framework for the prohibition of discrimination on these grounds and establishes a uniform minimum level of protection within the European Union for people who have suffered such discrimination.

This proposal builds upon three earlier directives: Directives 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, and Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services.

Currently, discrimination based on race or ethnic origin is prohibited in employment, occupation and vocational training, as well as in non-employment areas such as social protection, health care, education and access to goods and services, including housing, which are available to the public. Discrimination based on sex is prohibited in the same range of areas, with the exception of education and media and advertising. However, discrimination based on age, religion and belief, sexual orientation and disability is prohibited only in employment, occupation and vocational training.

Prior to the introduction of the draft directive, the social partners representing business expressed strong reservations concerning the new legislation, which they see as increasing red tape and costs. The trade unions, on the contrary, pronounced their support of the directive.

The Church and Society Commission (CSC) will examine the new directive carefully both from the legal and human rights perspective.

The draft directive as well as other related documents is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/fundamental_rights/public/pubst_en.htm#leg. The report of the European Network of Independent Experts in the non-discrimination field 'Developing Anti-Discrimination Law in Europe' provides a particularly interesting reading as well as the study on 'Tackling Multiple Discrimination: practices, policies and laws'.

CSC and EU Fundamental Rights Agency have a common agenda

On 20 May 2008, CSC Working Group for Human Rights and Religious Freedom met with Mr John Kellock, Head of Unit for Communication and External Relations of the new EU Fundamental Rights Agency. The members of the Working Group expressed interest in taking an active part in the work of the future Fundamental Rights Platform and stressed the churches' strong commitment to human rights. The participants of the Working Group welcomed the inauguration of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency and its Multi-Annual Framework (2007-2012).

The CSC Human Rights WG is currently working on a Human Rights Manual. The Manual will support and strengthen the churches' involvement in promoting and implementing human rights and will examine human rights from churches' perspective.

Visit of the CSC group on the Website of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency:

http://fra.europa.eu/fra/index.php?fuseaction=content.dsp_cat_content&catid=3e6c61340870c&contentid=4843b123bec71

Intercultural Dialogue

Islam, Christianity and Europe

How does 'Christian Europe' receive Islam in Europe? How to address the fear of 'Islamisation' of Europe and what are the chances for 'Europeanisation' of Islam? These were the questions addressed during the third meeting of the series of seminars devoted to Islam, Christianity and Europe organised by CSC, COMECE and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung on 3 July 2008 at the European Parliament.

The seminar concluded that in Europe many people fear Islam and that fear must be taken seriously, and challenged. Much of the fear could be countered if Europeans improved their knowledge of Islam, its history and interpretations and if the media would provide a more varied - and fairer - picture of Muslims and Islam. According to Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, who expressed the Christian view on the theme, for Churches coming to terms with Islam requires reflection on their mission as Churches and as missionary churches. The seminar made it clear that there are no religious reasons that would justify Christians and Muslims mistreating one another. It also highlighted that Islam and Christianity have much more in common than is often recognised, including common roots, values and concerns, like social justice. Even if it is Christianity, which has been the frame of reference for the development of European juridical and political structures, also Islam is "European" in its roots and historical development, and contributed to Europe in the fields of science and culture.

The full event report is attached to this Europe Update. The programmes and reports of the seminars as well as more information on the seminar project is available at: <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/Projectislam.shtml>

Churches and EU Presidencies

Churches exchange their experiences and plans over EU Presidencies

Representatives of churches in the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Sweden and the UK met with CSC in Höör, Sweden, on 26-27 May 2008 and planned co-operation over EU Presidencies. The seminar served as a forum to share experiences of churches from countries which recently have held an EU Presidency with churches from the upcoming presidency countries. It identified crucial issues in relation to the EU for the years to come and discussed opportunities for cooperation, especially among the churches in Sweden and the Czech Republic as they belong to the next presidency trio. Håkan Jonsson, Secretary of State from the Prime Minister's Office, joined the meeting to present the plans for the Swedish chairmanship in 2009.

In order to further share churches' experiences concerning EU Presidencies and to provide ideas on how the churches can get involved in an EU Presidency, CSC produced a guide for EU Presidencies. Besides sharing lessons learnt, the document gives an overview on what is an EU Presidency and how it would change in case the Treaty of Lisbon would one day enter into force. Please, find the CSC Guide to EU Presidencies attached to this Europe Update. You will also find it on-line at: <http://www.cce-kek.org/content/EuropeUpdates.shtml>

Bioethics

CSC comments EU plans regarding Organ Donation and Transplantation

In a recent statement to the European Commission, CSC welcomes the EC initiative aimed at developing a Quality and Safety Legal Framework on the Donation, Procurement, Testing, Transport, Preservation, Transplantation and Characterisation of Human Organs. Christian faith includes as a central feature "love for one's neighbour" and the expression of this may lead well to a freely chosen sacrifice. Thus, the churches support organ donation and transplantation as an expression of solidarity among human beings. However, the churches hold that it is equally important to respect human dignity and human rights and this conviction lies at the core of their approach to this field.

Referring to the Council of Europe's Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, CSC suggests that the Additional Protocol to the Convention concerning Transplantation of Organs and Tissues of Human Origin should be taken as a basis for any future EU legislation in this field. This will ensure compliance with this crucial human rights instrument to which CSC has contributed as an observer member of the Steering Committee on Bioethics of the Council of Europe.

In case this general provision would not be chosen, CSC statement includes proposals concerning the following areas of the Commission working document: the protection of potential donors; the evaluation and reduction of the risks of the donor; the procedure guaranteeing donor information and his or her rights and safeguards prescribed by law; information on the rights to access to independent advice about risks by a health professional having appropriate experience and who is not involved in the transplantation procedures; the informed consent of a living donor in a written form or before an official body; the right to freely withdraw consent at any time; the protection of persons legally not able to consent; organs removed from deceased persons; unpaid organ donation; exchange with third countries, and the fight against organ trafficking.

For more detailed information concerning CSC position regarding this European Commission Paper, consult the CEC website on bioethics:

<http://www.cec-kek.org/content/bioethics.shtml>

TVA

Commission proposes a reduced VAT for restoration and maintenance of worship places

The European Commission has issued on 7 July 2008 a proposal to change the VAT Directive 2006/112/EC so as to allow Member States to reduce value added tax to a minimum of 5 % for some specific services on a permanent basis. These services include, amongst others, renovation and maintenance of places of worship, cultural heritage and historical monuments. The first proposal of the European Commission only covered the repair of places of worship. The maintenance was incorporated into the proposal in line with the request made by EKD (Evangelical Church in Germany) and CSC.

The Commission proposal covers areas where there is sufficient evidence that reduced rates do not create problems for the proper functioning of the Internal Market. The sectors concerned are mainly so-called labour-intensive services and locally supplied services.

EKD-CSC contribution to the consultation on the "review of existing legislation on VAT reduced rates" (15.5.2008)

http://www.ekd.de/bevollmaechtigter/stellungnahmen/080515_Erm%E4%DFigter_Mehrwertsteuersatz.html

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/index_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/taxation/vat/how_vat_works/rates/index_en.htm

Migration

European Parliament approves the return directive - Churches continue to reiterate their human rights concerns

Following the Council agreement on the directive on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals (see Europe Update N°17), the Parliament approved the directive on 18 June. The churches had raised concerns over protection of human rights throughout the legislative process and continue to do so (see the press release below).

Press Release of CCME, EKD and their secular partners:

<http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/press%20Return%20Directive%20080626.pdf>

European Parliament resolution of 18 June 2008

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2008-0293+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN#BKMD-4>

Parliament Press Release:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/focus_page/018-32673-177-06-26-902-20080625FCS32672-25-06-2008-2008/default_p001c001_en.htm

Forthcoming events

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." At the invitation of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, the Assembly will take place in the "Sacro Cuore" conference centre, near Milan.

In its scope and content, the 7th ECEN Assembly will follow up 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 activities 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 is available at www.ecen.org

Other future CSC consultations

In addition to the above-mentioned event, CSC will, in the course of 2008, organise a few more consultations on themes linked to its work programme. A consultation focusing on religion in the public sphere has been scheduled to take place in Brussels on 18-20 November 2008. A brainstorming meeting on Ethics, Science and Technology is also planned for the year 2008.

Furthermore, CSC, in cooperation with COMECE and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 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 EU civil servants. The report of the third seminar is attached to this Europe Update. The last seminar takes place in Brussels on 11 September. For further information, please contact Ms Elina Eloranta, elo@cec-kek.be.

Other events

Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) organises a summer event "HIV/AIDS - A Gender Issue?" in Szczyrk, Poland, on 11-18 August 2008. The event is targeted for 18-30 years old youth leaders who have an interest in the issue and will be able to act as multipliers in their network. Deadline for applications is 25 July 2008. Application form and more information on the event is available at www.eyce.org

Churches European Rural Network (CERN) will organise a conference on churches, agriculture and rural communities in Europe at the Evangelische Landjugendakademie Altenkirchen, in Altenkirchen (near Bonn), Germany, on 1-4 September 2008. The working languages will be English and German. Full details (including registration information) are available at: <http://www.lja.de/index.php?id=98>

Past CSC events

Documents related to the conference on "Churches and Socially Responsible Investment" are now available at <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/investment.shtml>. The conference co-organised by CSC, Oikocredit and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland took place on 6-7 May in Brussels (see also Europe Update N°17).



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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 associated organisations 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>