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CSC Update on European Affairs

TOPICS COVERED:

European Elections 2009; climate change; intercultural cities; cultural capitals; social priorities of the Swedish EU Presidency; poverty; Lisbon Treaty; enlargement; migration; upcoming events.

European Elections 2009

Take an active part in the debates on the future of Europe

As was announced in previous Europe Updates, CSC together with Aprodev, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and Eurodiaconia have launched a campaign to encourage churches and church-related organisations to take part in the debates preceding the European elections of 4-7 June.

We invite you to take a look at the campaign website www.ecumenicalvoices2009.eu and inform us about your own related events, publications and activities. The election leaflet prepared by the four organisations is now available in English, French, German and Italian. It will also be translated into Czech and Greek with the support of our members. The Italian translation was offered to us by a partner organisation. We look forward to any other offers to translate the document. To order hard copies of the election leaflet in the three main languages (EN, FR, DE), to know more about the campaign or to inform us about your work, please contact Ms Elina Eloranta (elo@cec-kek.be).

Climate Change

CSC issues a briefing on the Commission proposal for post-Kyoto negotiations

As was announced in the last Europe Update, the European Commission published a Communication on 28 January 2009 setting out its vision on how efforts and solidarity

should be shared between the developed and the developing countries after 2012. CSC has prepared a briefing on this communication entitled, "Towards a Comprehensive Climate Change Agreement in Copenhagen". You will find the briefing attached to this Europe Update and on the CEC website.

Besides the European Parliament (see the briefing for news on that debate), the European Union (EU) negotiation position is currently discussed among the Member States. The Environment Council took place on 2 March, and the finance ministers will gather around the issue on 10 March. The first conclusions are expected to be agreed by the Heads of State and Government at the European Council of 19-20 March. The EU position will be further developed in the June and autumn summits.

The Commission communication and other related documents are available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/future_action.htm

Council conclusions are available at:

<http://eu2009.cz/en/news-and-documents/council-conclusions/default.htm>

Final report of the EP temporary climate change committee of 4 February:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2009-0042+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

Website of the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen 7-18 December 2009:

<http://www.cop15.dk/en/>

Churches urge Member States to invest in saving the creation

CSC and COMECE addressed the President of the European Council and the national delegations prior to the Spring Summit. Churches stressed that securing a stable climate is one of the most pressing moral and political challenges of the twenty first century. Failure to address this challenge would amount to a moral failure on the part of humanity as a whole.

According to the churches, the EU's unilateral 20% emissions reduction target is not ambitious enough. The EU should commit itself unilaterally to a mitigation target of at least 30% below 1990 levels by 2020 and this target should to the greatest possible extent be achieved within the boundaries of the EU. The churches urge Member States to invest in saving the creation. Member States should not let the current economic and financial crisis delay action. Many economists are of the opinion that unless action is taken the costs of mitigation and adaptation policies will rise significantly with every passing year.

Finally, the churches call for solidarity with developing countries, which bear the highest burden of climate change. Without far-reaching technological assistance and financial aid – in addition to the traditional development aid – developing countries will neither be able to decarbonise their economies nor to adapt to the negative impacts of climate change.

Intercultural Dialogue

European institutions promote intercultural cities

The Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union have joined forces to promote “Intercultural Cities”. For the CoE, this activity forms a part of its overall strategy on intercultural dialogue enshrined in the “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue”. The aim of the project is to communicate, especially to local authorities and city population, that increasing diversity in cities is not a threat but an asset, a positive and fruitful aspect of city life. Successful cities and societies of the future will be intercultural: they will be capable to manage and explore the potential of their cultural diversity to stimulate creativity and innovation and thus generate economic prosperity and a better quality of life. The project also looks at the religious dimension of cultural diversity and inter-religious dialogue.

12 cities around Europe have been chosen as pilot cities. In these cities, the authorities together with other actors devise and implement intercultural strategies. The strategies include plans to develop governance structures and leadership, access to public debate and the media, intercultural mediation, cultural policies and action. The experience gained in pilot cities will serve future work in other cities. The pilot cities are: Berlin Neukölln (Germany), Craiova (Romania), Greenwich (UK), Izhevsk (Russia), Lyon (France), Lublin (Poland), Melitopol (Ukraine), Neuchâtel (Switzerland), Patras (Greece), Reggio Emilia (Italy), Stavropol (Russia) and Subotica (Serbia). The project is coordinated at the Council of Europe by the Head of the Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage, Irena Guidikova.

Read more about Intercultural Cities:

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/Policies/Cities/default_en.asp

CSC Briefing on CoE White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (December 2008):

<http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CSCBriefingonICDDecember2008.pdf>

.. and Capitals of Culture

The European Union also has a project of its own concerning cities. Since 1985, the EU provides a programme on European Capitals of Culture. Cities can apply to have this title for one year and be supported by EU funds. The current Cultural Capitals are Vilnius (Lithuania) and Linz (Austria). Next year, the title will be held by Essen (Germany), Pécs (Hungary) and Istanbul (Turkey) and in the year 2011 by Turku (Finland) and Tallinn (Estonia).

In the past, at least churches in Sibiu (Romania) and in Luxemburg have been involved in the programme of the Cultural Capital. The churches in Essen are prepared to play a visible role in the activities of their year. In Turku, the Archbishop of Turku and the head of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, Jukka Paarma, is involved in the preparations.

Read more about the European Capitals of Culture:

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc413_en.htm

Get involved or share experience

CEC member churches concerned with the two above-mentioned city projects (in the past, present or future) are invited to contact the CSC office in Strasbourg (carla.maurer@cec-kek.fr). CEC would like to link churches for an exchange of experience and to support church involvement in the projects.

Social Affairs

Priorities of the Swedish EU Presidency in the social field

Sweden, which will hold the EU Presidency in the second half of this year, announced its two priorities in the social field: healthy and dignified ageing and labour market inclusion.

Sweden considers that the evolution of demography requires an increased focus on the older people. During its presidency, the country will promote healthy lifestyles and dignity in long-term care. It also wishes to improve collaboration between the social and health sectors including at policy level. The Presidency will organise a related conference in September, the results of which will feed the conclusions of the November Employment and Social Affairs Council. As a second priority, the Swedish Presidency will seek to identify successful policies to promote labour market inclusion in the framework of the reform of labour markets and social security systems. The Presidency will hold a ministerial meeting in July and an expert conference in October. The results of those events will feed the conclusions of the November Council as well as provide an input for post-Lisbon Strategy plans.

Besides its own thematic priorities, the Swedish Presidency will organize the 8th Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion on 15-17 October in Stockholm. Churches are involved in the preparations of this annual event both at the national and at the Brussels level.

European Year of Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010

Poverty and social exclusion are issues of major concern and counter-action for churches in a permanent manner. In the EU context, this theme will enjoy exceptional visibility during the European Year of Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010. The €17 million campaign aims to reaffirm the EU's commitment to making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty. CSC is already getting ready for the year. If you are organising national level events or wish to take part in European level action, please contact Rev. Dr. Dieter Heidtmann (dht@cec-kek.be).

Read more about the year at:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/emplweb/news/news_en.cfm?id=326

European Integration

Quo vadis Lisbon Treaty?

The ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty continues. At the moment, 23 EU Member States have completed the ratification. The Treaty has not yet been adopted by Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. A step in that direction was taken in the Czech Republic, where the lower house of the parliament adopted the Treaty on 18 February. The Senate is expected to vote in April. The rumours still hold that the second referendum in Ireland will take place in September or October 2009. The December Summit set a new target for the entry into force of the treaty at the end of this year.

Please, find the revised CSC Report on the Treaty of Lisbon at:
<http://www.cec-kek.org/content/integration.shtml>

EU: economics as the main argument to support enlargement

At the request of the Czech EU Presidency, the European Commission has published a study of economic achievement and challenges resulting from the enlargements in 2004 and 2007. According to the Communication, the enlargement has boosted the economies and improved living standards in the new Member States, thereby also benefiting the old Member States notably through new export and investment opportunities. The accession of 12 new Member States has increased the weight of the EU in the world and made it a stronger international player, in both economic and political terms. Besides the economic focus, the report highlights that the enlargement has strengthened European security and made the EU stronger and culturally richer.

The Communication was examined at a Czech Presidency conference on 2 March. On that occasion, Alexandr Volna, Czech Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, said that “the overwhelmingly positive impact on the European internal market has proved to be the principal argument in favour of enlargement.”

Five years of an enlarged EU: economic achievements and challenges, COM (2009) 79/3:
http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/publication14091_en.pdf

Migration

CCME launches a project on integration through religion

CCME will hold the first workshop of the MIRACLE project (Models of Integration through Religion, Activation, Cultural Learning and Exchange) in Brussels on 15-17 March 2009. Persons representing the six European partners of the project will attend. The MIRACLE project will look for models of integration between migrants and host society through religious and cultural learning and exchange as well as activation and strengthening of migrant participation. Churches and communities play a decisive role in encouraging a process of integration that involves and changes both newly arrived immigrants and hosting society.

European Commission proposes European Asylum Support Office

As was indicated earlier (Europe Update N° 21), one of the priority initiatives of the European Commission for this year was to take the first steps towards establishing a European Asylum Support Office (EASO). According to the Commission proposal of 18 February, EASO will have tasks in three important areas: supporting practical cooperation on asylum, assisting Member States under particular pressure through possibly deploying asylum support teams and contributing to the implementation of the Common European Asylum System. The office will have no decision-making powers. However, the Commission expressed hope that the work of the EASO would lead to an approximation of asylum decisions throughout the EU. Current practice in the implementation of the right of asylum illustrates the fact that there are major differences in the way Member States deal with applications for international protection. For example, an Iraqi has a 71% chance of obtaining protection in one Member State but only a 2% chance in another. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will be present on the executive board of EASO, although without voting rights. Civil Society presence will be channeled through a consultative body.

In December 2008, CCME through the European umbrella organization ECRE (European Council for Refugees and Exiles) called for the establishment of a well-resourced, transparent and democratically accountable support office. This would include a strong involvement of the European Parliament. In addition, ECRE underlined that independent asylum experts, including NGOs, should play an important role in the work of EASO. UNHCR spokesman, Ron Redmond, emphasized that establishing the support office "should ultimately result in more consistent, fair and effective asylum systems across the EU".

The regulation establishing EASO will be adopted by co-decision, a procedure under which the European Parliament and the Council act as co-legislators. The Commission proposal was well received by immigration ministers at their first exchange of views on the topic on 26-27 February. The European Commission hopes EASO to be operational already in 2010.

Proposal for a regulation establishing a European Asylum Support Office, 2009 (COM) 66
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0066:FIN:EN:PDF>

Upcoming CSC events

"Shaping European Economic and Social Policies in Times of Uncertainty" Conference in Brussels/Mechelen on 28-30 April 2009

The conference "Employment and the Churches in Europe" held in February 2008 led to the process of establishing a new network on employment and related economic questions. The network shall be officially launched in autumn 2009. In order to pave the way, CSC will hold a consultation on "Shaping European Economic and Social Policies in Times of Uncertainty" on 28-30 April 2009. The second day of the consultation will take place in the European Parliament. The conference will evaluate the EU's economic and social policies in the last 5 years and discuss strategy for the forthcoming election period, including the social dimension of the Lisbon strategy (Europe's strategy for growth and jobs) after 2010 and the Lisbon Treaty. The conference will also explore the impact of the current economic crisis on

people in Europe and strategies for social protection. For further information, contact Rev. Dr. Dieter Heidtmann (dht@cec-kek.be).

Other events

The CSC Plenary meeting shall take place in Nyborg (Denmark) on 11-15 March. The CEC 13th Assembly shall take place in Lyon (France) on 15-21 July. The CSC Europe Secretaries meeting is scheduled to take place in Brussels on 17-19 November.



Church and Society Commission

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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>

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