



Conference of European Churches
Conférence des Églises Européennes
Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen

N ° 24

3/ 2009

CSC Update on European Affairs

TOPICS COVERED:

CSC plenary meeting, economic and financial crisis; climate change; Eastern Partnership; European elections 2009; anti-discrimination directive, the Second CoE exchange on religious education; nuclear non-proliferation; KKR visit to Brussels; poverty; Sunday protection; migration; upcoming events.

CSC Plenary Meeting

The Church and Society Commission (CSC) met in Nyborg on 11-15 March 2009 for its annual plenary meeting. The Commission meeting was hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark and took place at the birthplace of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the Nyborg Strand Hotel.

During the plenary meeting, the Annual Review of the Commission's work was adopted as well as the work plan for 2009-2010. The ongoing and foreseen projects include, for instance, a campaign to encourage members to join the debates preceding the European elections in June 2009, a Conference on Europe's social and economic policies and a Dialogue Seminar on climate change. CSC will further networking especially on educational matters and on employment. The commission will issue a policy document on European integration and agriculture, and a human rights manual.

Much of the current work is geared towards the CEC General Assembly on 15-21 July. The CSC plenary devoted a considerable amount of time to evaluate the work done over the last six years as well as to reflect on the strategic objectives for CSC. This reflection was informed by the results of the consultation among the CEC members on the draft CSC Work Programme 2009-2015. The plenary issued two public statements. CSC addressed the Council of Europe on its 60th Anniversary and the European Union on Sunday protection (see below).

The representatives of the Danish churches, led by the Bishop of Funen, Kresten Drejergaard, and the deputy mayor of the City Council, Mr Alex Ahrendtsen welcomed the CSC Commission in Odense. The Danish churches hosted a dinner during which the Commission

learned about the present church life in Denmark as well as heard testimonies and anecdotes of those involved in the life of CEC in the last 50 years, including accounts from the pre-meeting at Slagelse in 1957 and from the ship MS Bornholm in 1964. Representatives of the Church of Denmark affirmed their long-standing commitment to the ecumenical movement.

A worship service was held in Copenhagen Cathedral on Sunday. It was followed by a public event on the theme "The role of religion in the public sphere".

Lyon Assembly website: <http://assembly.ceceurope.org/>

European Council and G20

In the midst of crisis leaders shed confidence

The European Council of 19-20 March 2009 considered tackling the financial and economic crisis, one of the most important challenges EU has ever faced. It emphasised that concerted action and coordination are now essential. EU decided to strengthen regulation and supervision of the financial sector and to stimulate credit flowing to the real economy. The overall message was that EU is capable of managing the situation; confidence can be restored.

The social impact of the crisis was also recognised. The EU countries agreed on the need to protect citizens from the worst impacts of the crisis. Especially the rapid increase of unemployment was a cause of great concern. Here, the Member States emphasised learning of new skills required by new jobs, mobility and flexicurity. The EU leaders agreed to hold a special Employment Summit in May to exchange experience on the effectiveness of the measures taken to support employment. However, after the Spring Summit news were spread that what was meant to be an informal summit had been turned into a rather ordinary event between the EU Presidency, the European Commission and social partners.

The current crisis has been debated in several other high-level meetings, the most important one having been the G20 Summit in London on 2 April. The final communiqué echoes the message of the EU Spring Summit. The leaders of the world's largest economies pledged to do their utmost (1) to restore confidence, growth, and jobs; (2) to repair the financial system to restore lending; (3) to strengthen financial regulation to rebuild trust; (4) to fund and reform international financial institutions to overcome this crisis and prevent future ones; (5) to promote global trade and investment and reject protectionism, to underpin prosperity; and (6) to build an inclusive, green, and sustainable recovery. The G20 leaders are expected to meet before the end of the year to evaluate the progress.

Website of the London Summit: <http://www.londonsummit.gov.uk/en/>

Addressing the climate change

With regard to climate change, the Spring European Council reiterated EU's commitment to play a leading role in bringing about a global and comprehensive climate agreement in Copenhagen in December 2009. The EU Member States agreed to determine well before December their position on main approaches for financing mitigation, adaptation,

technology support and capacity building. In addition, they will determine the specifics of the EU contribution and the burden sharing. An information meeting of the ministers for the environment will be held on 14-15 April; the next official meeting on 25 June. The EU leaders will look at the issue again at the European Council of 18-19 June. The conclusions of the March Summit were informed by:

External Relations Council of 16 March on the development dimension for the post-2010 climate change agreement:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st07/st07645.en09.pdf>

ECOFIN of 12 March on the international financing of climate change:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st07/st07443.en09.pdf>

Environment Council of 3 March on the EU position for a comprehensive post-2010 climate agreement: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st07/st07128.en09.pdf>

Environment Council of 3 March on the preparation of the Spring Summit:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st07/st07065.en09.pdf>

For more news on climate change, see the chapter below.

Eastern Partnership

The Spring European Council endorsed the Czech EU Presidency initiative of launching the Eastern Partnership in a Summit on 7 May. The Eastern Partnership is meant to accelerate reforms in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine and enhance the co-operation between EU and the respective countries. The reinforced co-operation takes place in the overall framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

European Council Conclusions (including the Declaration on the Eastern Partnership):

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/106809.pdf

European Elections 2009

Take an active part in the debates on the future of Europe – and order campaign material

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 Czech, English, French, German, Greek and Italian. The CSC Brussels office still has a stock of the documents (EN, FR and DE). To order hard copies, to know more about the campaign or to inform us about your

work, please contact Ms Elina Eloranta (elo@cec-kek.be). We mail up to 20 copies for free and charge 25 Euros for mailing for up to 90 copies.

Human Rights & Church-State relations

The European Parliament supports the anti-discrimination directive

With 363 in favour (most of liberals, greens, socialists and left) and 226 against (mostly centre-right), the European Parliament (EP) approved, with substantial amendments, the Commission proposal for a new anti-discrimination directive. The proposal, published at the beginning of July 2008, aims to implement the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation *outside the labour market*. This directive compliments the earlier directive for equal treatment in employment. Specific directives are already in place to cover the area in question with regard to racial and ethnic origin and equal treatment between men and women (see Europe Update N° 18).

The European Parliament resolution of 2 April 2009 provides new arguments in favour of the directive. Besides that diversity as such should be respected, discrimination undermines the objective of a high level of employment and social protection, the raising of the standard of living, quality of life, economic and social cohesion and solidarity. It also undermines the objective of developing EU as an area of freedom, security and justice.

The overruled opposition considered that the directive, especially with the EP amendments, increases bureaucracy and expense for businesses. The EP resolution holds that money can no longer serve as an excuse not to adopt anti-discriminatory measures. For instance, only “buildings whose structure is protected specifically under national law on account of their historical, cultural and architectural value” would not “necessarily” be demanded to be subject to “significant structural changes” to facilitate access of people with disabilities. The original Commission text measures the proportionality against “a number of factors including the size, resources and nature of the organisation”.

In relation to religion, EP regards the objective of non-discrimination superior to the Declaration 11 of the Amsterdam Treaty (in force) and the Treaty of Lisbon (not yet ratified), which recognise that the state-church relations are a matter which the EU Member States agree nationally. The EP resolution states: “Where the activities of churches or other organizations based on religion and belief fall within the EU competence, they shall be subject to the Union’s non-discrimination provisions.” The only specific case concerning religion named in the Commission proposal was education. The Commission would allow Member States to “provide for differences in access to educational institutions based on religion or belief.” The Commission proposes: “Member States may also allow or prohibit the wearing or display of religious symbols at school.” The EP deleted the reference to religious symbols, and suggests stricter criteria to apply with regard to differentiated access to schools with a religious ethos. The differences in access to such educational institutions may only be allowed “on the basis of objective justifications”. The Member States must also ensure that the institutions do not discriminate on any other grounds (than religion or belief) and that other educational institutions are geographically accessible and form a reasonable alternative.

The decision on the anti-discrimination directive will be taken by the Council (the EU Member States) and it requires unanimity. The Parliament opinion serves as a food for thought in the current debate. Last autumn the French EU Presidency discussed the matter in relation to age, disability and EU competence. With the Czech EU Presidency not considering the issue a priority, the next substantial discussions in the Council working groups are expected to be held during the Swedish EU Presidency this autumn.

Churches are called to address their national governments

CSC has welcomed the directive as an important instrument to promote the realisation of human rights. At the same time, CSC is concerned about the provisions suggested by EP, which interfere with church-state relations. The Treaty of Lisbon, if ratified, would give legal value to the recognition, now stipulated in Declaration 11, that the "Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States (Art 17 TFEU)." The Director of CSC, Rüdiger Noll, calls churches to raise the issue with their national governments: "As the negotiations in the Council proceed, it is important for the churches in the EU Member States to approach their governments in order to avoid that the new directive interferes with Declaration 11 and Article 17 of the Treaty of Lisbon. Church-state relations are not a competence of EU."

If you decide to act, please, keep us informed through Ms Elizabeta Kitanovic (eki@cec-kek.be).

The EP resolution and other related EP documents (opinions of different committees etc.):
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2009-0211+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

Intercultural Dialogue

The Council of Europe continues the dialogue on religious education

The Committee of Ministers (CM) of the Council of Europe (CoE) invites representatives and experts from the three monotheistic religions present in Europe, international NGOs, scholars, educationalists and representatives from the 47 CoE Member States for the Second Annual Exchange on the Religious Dimension of the Intercultural Dialogue in Strasbourg on 29-30 June 2009.

A preparation meeting convened by the CoE Ambassadors of Denmark and San Marino took place on 27 March. In addition to the CoE staff, around 20 representatives of the above-mentioned groups took part in the meeting including two CSC Strasbourg Executive Secretaries and a representative of ICCS (Intereuropean Commission on Church and School - an associate member of CEC). In the meeting, the CSC representatives suggested continuing to discuss last year's issue of education and teaching about religion in a wider sense (role of religion in terms of education for citizenship). However, it was decided that the Second Annual Exchange will look at the issue more narrowly from the perspective of the formal education.

This year's Exchange will last two days in order to have more space for informal encounters. The proposal to devote some time for working group discussions was not met with enthusiasm by CM representatives. Several participants recalled the lack of active participation of the Member States' representatives in last year's meeting, which ran counter to the actual purpose of the Exchange.

Religious communities were asked to suggest names of potential participants, taking into account the need for a balance between educational and religious experts. Member States may also propose names including religious representatives, as it was the case in 2008. Interested CEC member churches are invited to contact CSC, Ms Marie-Madeleine Linck (csc@cec-kek.fr) as well as their respective governments.

The First Annual Exchange was held on 8 April 2008 (see Europe Update N° 16).

Climate Change

Commission stirs debate on adaptation

The climate change action can be summarised in two words: mitigation and adaptation. Mitigation refers to action to reduce green house gas emissions. Adaptation is about minimising the effects of global warming. On 1 April 2009, the European Commission provided a new important input to the debate on adaptation by issuing a White Paper entitled "Adapting to Climate Change: Towards a European Framework for Action".

Find the White Paper and other related documents at:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/adaptation/index_en.htm

Peace & Security

Future of NATO and Weapons of Mass Destruction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) held its 60th Anniversary Summit in Strasbourg and Kehl on 3-4 April 2009. The Summit welcomed Albania and Croatia as new members and appointed the Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen as the new NATO Secretary General as from 1 August 2009 on. The Summit launched the process to develop a new Strategic Concept for the organisation (including out of area operations, such as in Afghanistan and off the coast of Somalia). The new Strategic Concept is foreseen to be approved at the next NATO Summit in Portugal in 2010.

Prior the Summit, the Conference of European Churches, the World Council of Churches, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and the Canadian Council of Churches sent a joint letter to NATO. In their statement, the churches urged the NATO Member States to use the opportunity provided by the revision of the Strategic Concept to take new initiatives with the view of ending NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons. The churches also called nuclear weapon states for a serious pursuit of reciprocal disarmament.

Full text of the letter: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/messages-and-letters/30-03-09-letter-to-nato.html>

Declaration on Alliance Security:

http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52838.htm?mode=pressrelease

Speaking in Prague on 5 April, US President Barack Obama declared his wish to see a world free of nuclear weapons, starting with negotiations with Russia for a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. Full speech by President Obama:

http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered/

The European Commission has proposed working towards greater nuclear non-proliferation, including involvement in the development of a guaranteed nuclear fuel supply system under the umbrella of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA):

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/485&format=HTML&aged=0&lan>

Regions

Churches along the Rhine meet with the EU Committee of the Regions

Upon the invitation of CSC, the Committee of the Conference of the Churches along the Rhine (KKR) visited Brussels on 23-24 March 2009, and met with the General Secretary of the Committee of the Regions (CoR), Gerhard Stahl. The members of this EU advisory body are elected municipal or regional politicians, often leaders of regional governments or city majors. They are nominated by the Member States so that the political, geographical and regional/local balance of the country is represented. The main task of CoR is to issue opinions on the European Commission's proposals. Besides that, CoR aims to bring the EU closer to the citizens.

A lively discussion took place between the KKR delegation and Mr Stahl on the understanding of the concept of region. In the CoR context, "region" refers to regions and areas within a country. Only recently, the CoR members have organised themselves in trans-national working groups, called "intergroups". In contrast to CoR, KKR has since its beginning been dedicated to the trans-national aspects of regional politics.

Two open questions emerged from the meeting with Mr Stahl. First, how can KKR contribute to the soon to be starting CoR process to draft new guidelines for its overall work? Second, how could the regional groups of the CEC and the intergroups of the CoR work together in the future? In general, it was recognised that CoR provides an interesting venue to voice the concerns of different regions and that the possibility to influence the opinions and statements of the CoR vis-à-vis the EU institutions should be exploited. KKR and the CoR General Secretary agreed to further reflect on these issues and look for ways of co-operation.

The KKR delegation also visited the CSC Brussels office to discuss future co-operation. The co-operation with KKR and the CSC Strasbourg office has been active for years. Finally, the visit provided an opportunity for the KKR delegation to learn about the work of the office of

the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) in Brussels and about the possibilities churches have to apply for EU funding.

Social Affairs

2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion

The European Commission has designated 2010 as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. 79 million people in the EU – or 16% of the population – currently live at risk of poverty (Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2009). The European Year 2010 intends to raise public awareness of the way poverty continues to blight the daily lives of so many Europeans.

CSC would like to encourage its member churches and associated organisations to take an active part in the manifold activities of the European Year 2010. On 28-30 April 2009, CSC will hold a Conference on “Shaping European Economic and Social Policies in Times of Uncertainty” in the European Parliament in Brussels (see below). This occasion will also be used to discuss the churches’ activities and priorities with regard to the Year 2010. In order to prepare the discussion, we kindly invite you to inform us about those activities of your church or organisation, which could be linked with the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Please send your contributions to csc@cec-kek.be at your earliest convenience, if possible before 30 April 2009.

You will find further information in the attached CSC briefing paper.

Working Time Directive and Sunday Protection

In the negotiations between the European Parliament (EP) and the Council on the Working Time Directive, "no agreement could be reached on the main controversial aspects" of the directive, according to German Socialist MEP Mechtild Rothe, who is the chairperson of the Parliament's delegation to the conciliation committee. Council-Parliament negotiations became necessary after EP voted against national opt-outs to the directive in December 2008. A final agreement must be achieved by the Parliament's plenary session in Strasbourg on 4-7 May. If the conciliation fails, the current proposal for a working time directive will be dismissed. It is then for the European Commission to decide whether it tables a new proposal.

In the meanwhile, European churches and trade unions continue to stress the importance of Sunday as a weekly day of rest for the health and safety of workers. The CSC Plenary meeting in Nyborg last month called on the EU Member States and the EU institutions to protect Sunday as a weekly rest day in order to enhance both the protection of workers' health and the reconciliation of work and family life. CEC's Member Churches and Associated Organisations are invited to be active in the debate.

An EP Declaration on the protection of a work-free Sunday as an essential pillar of the European Social Model and a part of the European cultural heritage has been signed by 224 MEPs.

CSC statement on Sunday Protection: <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/pr-cq0913e.shtml>

Read more at: <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/pr-cq0913e.shtml>
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/plenary/writtenDecl/wdFastOngoing.do?language=EN&startValue=30>

Migration

CCME: proposal for new “Dublin II” regulation step forward, but many asylum seekers still without adequate protection

The Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) together with five other Christian organisations have examined the European Commission proposal regarding the reform of the EU regulation, which determines which EU Member State is responsible for examining an asylum application launched in any EU Member State (the so-called “Dublin II” regulation).

The Christian organisations welcome the new provisions, which would limit the imposition of detention, guarantee the right to a personal interview for each asylum seeker in the Dublin procedure; and grant stronger protections for vulnerable people. The organisations also positively highlight the proposals to expand the definition of ‘the family’. At the same time, the Christian organisations reiterate their concerns that the Dublin system harbours serious shortcomings. Its implementation continues to demonstrate that it does not efficiently process asylum applications, support the notion of a Common European Asylum System nor uphold a sense of justice and dignity for asylum seekers. Moreover, “to the misfortune of affected asylum seekers, some ... border Member States do not have the capacity to provide adequate reception conditions and asylum procedures. This means that a significant number of persons who seek asylum in Europe are left without the protection they need”

Read the full position paper at:

http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/Chr%20Grp_Common%20paper%20on%20EC%20proposals%20for%20Dublin%20II_FINAL%20d.pdf

The Commission proposal:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0820:FIN:EN:PDF>

Combating trafficking in human beings: proposal for new framework directive adopted

On 25 March 2009, the European Commission issued a proposal for a framework directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings, and protecting victims. The proposal aims at establishing specific standards of protection for all victims of trafficking. In addition to specifying measures in the area of penal law and law enforcement, the directive develops a set of standards on victim support. It foresees the establishment of mechanisms for early identification and assistance of victims and lays down a set of standard of assistance to victims. CCME, which had been involved in the European Commission’s expert consultation

prior to the adoption of the proposal generally welcomed the intention of the proposal and will in the next weeks comment it in more detail.

The Commission proposal:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0136: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).

Pre-announcement: Dialogue Seminar on Climate Change

« I believe this is a moral issue. » Al Gore, An Inconvenient Truth 2006.

CSC together with the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) and the European Commission are planning to organise a Dialogue Seminar on climate change in Brussels in mid-June. The seminar is initially entitled “Towards an Ethical Debate - Climate Change as a Challenge for Lifestyles, Solidarity and Justice”. It will assess the EU initiatives to address climate change and discuss the role of education in the transition towards a low carbon economy, and climate change as an issue of solidarity and justice. For further information, contact Rev. Dr. Peter Pavlovic (ppt@cec-kek.be).

Other events

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>

Issued 9.4.2009.