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CSC Update on European Affairs

European Integration

The constitutional debate

The debate on the Constitutional Treaty is again going at full speed but opinions differ remarkably. The 18 countries who have ratified the Treaty, together with Portugal and Ireland, gathered in Madrid on 26 January under the heading “the Friends of the Constitutional Treaty”. The conference stated in a press release that the basis of the ongoing constitutional debate is on the current Treaty proposal, which should “retain its substance and balance”. Although Germany, which holds the EU Presidency, only attended the meeting as an observer, its official line is the same as the one stated in Madrid. Among other supporters of this approach is the new President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pötering (EPP-DE).

Nicolas Sarkozy’s suggestion of a mini-Treaty is not getting much direct support but there are quite a few (especially French) who are in favour of a shorter and a more readable text. At the same time, there are requests expressed for an extended Treaty. For example, the Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt, has asked the parties not to try to identify what should be removed from the Treaty but to reflect on what should be added to it in order to achieve a consensus.

One of the new elements most lobbied for is a stronger commitment to the enhancement of social rights.

Finally, at least the future Dutch coalition government (Christian Democrats of the CDA, the Labour PvdA and ChristenUnie) wants to have a new EU treaty. It has announced that it would accept a treaty which would respect the principle of subsidiarity and democratic control and which would have a clearly different content, volume and name as the current draft.

The German Chancellor Angela Merkel has tried to bargain with the countries most against it (UK, Poland and the Czech Republic) by arguing that no enlargements (and the above-listed countries are in favour of them) can take place before the constitutional reform.

Timetable

The German EU Presidency will present a proposal on the Constitutional Treaty in early June. In the preparation of the new proposal, the Presidency opted for the so called Sherpa method (preparation by government mandated experts). The round of meetings regarding the Constitutional Treaty will be held in April-May. In addition to the bilateral talks with the Presidency, an additional meeting may be organised among all the Sherpas in Berlin later this spring.

The German Presidency foresees that an inter-governmental conference would be organised to decide upon the new treaty.

Berlin Declaration

The Presidency is currently finishing its round of bilateral talks with Sherpas concerning the Berlin Declaration. The Declaration, which celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, is to inspire the European project, with a reference to its history, shared values and future perspectives.

It now appears that there are deep divisions regarding its content. The German Presidency has sought to avoid troubles by stating that the Declaration would not make a reference to the constitutional process. However, the college of Commissioners has completely opposite wishes. It would like the Declaration to help in solving the constitutional impasse.

Angela Merkel's proposal for a reference to Christianity in the Declaration is strongly supported by Poland. Nine EU countries (France, Italy, Spain, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Hungary, Belgium and Greece) recently called for a revival of social Europe hoping that that appeal would also have an influence in the Berlin Declaration. Also the German Presidency would like to use the Declaration to show a greater attachment to the social dimension of Europe. In a completely opposite way, the Czech Republic would like it to highlight the EU's liberal trade. It also requires a reference to the reduction of bureaucracy, the EU's stabilising role in the world as well as to the enlargement. The UK joins the last point, wishing the Declaration to commemorate the EU's successful enlargement.

The President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso has made five proposals for the Declaration. According to him, it should promote *solidarity* through greater cohesion, *sustainability* as a way to fight against climate change, *accountability* of the EU institutions vis-à-vis the citizens, *security* of its citizens as well as European *values*

and *interests* in the world. Furthermore, Barroso joins his colleagues hoping that the Declaration would create the momentum to settle “the institutional question.”

The Berlin Declaration will be approved in the informal meeting of the Heads of States and Governments in Berlin on 25 March.

Energy & Environment

Commitments needed in the fight against climate change

This spring energy and climate change are, together with the debate around the Constitutional Treaty, at the top of the EU agenda. In the recent period of time concerns have been raised about high EU dependence on the energy supply, reliance of the supply and its diversity, and on rising costs of energy. This coincides with the publication of several highly authoritative reports on climate change (e.g. Stern report for the UK government and the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), which confirm that non-action in responding to current trends would have far reaching consequences in terms of additional costs for economy and development as well as dramatic consequences on the way of life all over the globe and are, therefore, to be taken into consideration with urgency.

In January 2007 the European Commission published “Energy for Europe”-package with a number of related documents. In its integrated energy & environment strategy the Commission recommends the EU energy policy to be subordinated to the goal to limit the rise of global temperature to 2 °C compared to the pre-industrial era. In concrete terms, the Commission proposes 30 % reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the industrialized countries by 2020, and at least 20% unilateral EU target in the case that there would not be an international agreement. The Commission also suggests 20% target for renewable energies by 2020, with 10 % of biofuels.

The Commission’s proposals are now under discussion. The main questions are how to distribute the emission quotas for greenhouse gases among the EU Member States and whether the objectives should be binding or indicative.

The Parliament is actively involved in the debate. It has legislative power in relation to environmental policies. It is probable that in addition to the existing committee for environmental affairs, a committee of inquiry on climate change will be established.

The next step in the process is the adoption of the EU action plan on energy by the European Summit in 8/9 March. The Spring Summit is also foreseen make a statement regarding the climate change. There, it is likely to call upon the EU to play a major role in developing and reinforcing the system for trading in emission quotas.

Churches are called to act

The 6th Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) in October 2006 called for emphasis on sufficiency, efficiency, use of renewables and planet perspective in everyday life. Churches in Europe are now strongly encouraged to raise their voice in the debate on energy and climate change and to support the initiative of the European Commission and link it to the specific Christian perspective on the subject. ECEN is providing tangible support for that work through its many contributions (see the chapter on publications in this update).

The Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland has already responded to this call. Speaking at the national bishops' conference on 13 February, the Archbishop Jukka Paarma stressed the need for ecological responsibility. What we do, or do not, has an influence on the life of the God's creation, he said. He reminded the conference that climate change hits first and hardest the most vulnerable. He went on emphasising that good life should not be based on high level of consumption and material living standards but on caring for others, mental balance, spiritual security and the joy of human relationships and God's gifts. It also involves ecologically responsible citizenship.

ECEN call to European churches:

<http://www.ecen.org/cms/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=152&cntnt01dateformat=%25e%20%25B%20%25G&cntnt01returnid=87>

Commission Energy package:

http://ec.europa.eu/energy/energy_policy/index_en.htm

Conclusions of the Energy Council (15 February 2007):

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/trans/92799.pdf

Conclusions of the Environment Council (20 February 2007):

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/envir/92864.pdf

Employment & Social affairs

Take part in the labour law consultation

We would like to remind you about the public consultation the European Commission launched in November (see the update n° 3) on reviewing labour law and adaptation to the modern world of work. The Green Paper - "Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century" - asks how labour law at EU and national level should be evolved. The Commission intends to promote flexibility in the job markets while increasing security for workers. The consultation is also an important part of the EU's Social Agenda 2005-2010.

The consultation deals, among other issues, with:

- New contractual forms of employment (e.g. temporary agency work, sub-contracting, disguised employment) and undeclared work;
- More flexible social security rules;
- "Good work": Anti-discrimination, health, safety protection;
- The impact on private life (working time, mobility, family life);
- Life-long learning;
- Gender and intergenerational dimension;
- Situation of less-skilled and handicapped people.

The modernisation of labour law might, therefore, have an impact on the legal framework for churches and church-related organisations as employers (e.g. regarding the autonomy of the churches and anti-discrimination rules).

Members are invited to take part in the preparation of the joint Church and Society Commission (CSC)-Eurodiaconia response and to send their comments to the 14 questions raised in the Green Paper to Rev. Dr. Dieter Heidtmann (dht@cec-kek.be) by 10 March 2007. The briefing paper attached to this update will provide further information.

The Green Paper is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/labour_law/green_paper_en.htm

Spring Summit

In the preparation of the Spring Summit, the Commission has published its regular reports on employment and on social protection and social inclusion. These reports are to be adopted by the Employment and Social Policy Council on its meeting on 22 February as a joint Commission-Council input for the Spring Summit conclusions.

Joint Report on Employment 2006-2007

The employment report gives the following evaluation regarding developments in three priority areas of the European Employment Strategy. The EU countries are progressing rather well in attracting and retaining people onto the labour market. There have been some improvements with regard to investing in human capital although life-long learning is in stagnation. Finally, according to the Commission, relatively little effort has been made to improve workers' and enterprises' adaptability. The Commission seeks to provide fresh impetus in this area by publishing a communication on flexicurity for the summer.

Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007

Last year the Member States provided the first-ever integrated national reports on strategies for social inclusion, pensions, healthcare and long-term care. In the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, the Commission analysed the reports drawing the following conclusions:

- Member States have responded to the challenge to reduce child poverty with clear commitments. Here, the situation of immigrants and ethnic minorities needs particular attention.
- Conditionality in accessing social benefits has increased, but this must not push those unable to work further into social exclusion. More attention needs to be given to ensuring adequate levels of minimum income.
- In their first European plans on healthcare and long-term care, Member States identify as a priority the need to ensure equal access for all, to reduce health inequalities in outcomes, to guarantee safe and high-quality care and to manage the introduction of new technology for health and independent living.
- Many countries are adapting pension systems to increases in life expectancy. Older people often face a higher poverty risk than the general population.
- Despite current reforms, ageing will increase expenditure on pensions, health and long-term care by 4% of the GDP by 2050. The long-term sustainability of public finances is at risk.
- Stakeholders, including the people directly affected, are increasingly involved in preparing social reforms but the quality of the involvement could be improved. Stakeholders' role should be extended to implementation and follow-up.

Health Services

CSC and Eurodiaconia call for the protection of the specificities of the health services

Following the removal of health services from the scope of the Directive on services in the internal market (which was adopted in December 2006, see the update n° 3), the Commission is now reflecting on how to approach this particular area. In order to inform itself prior to giving any legislative proposals (either at the end of the year 2007 or in the year 2008), it held a public consultation, which ended in January.

In their joint response Eurodiaconia and the Church and Society Commission of the CEC expressed their concern that the expansion of cross-border services may lead to the marketisation of these services to the detriment of their special characteristics. These include the public or general interest they serve and the principle of solidarity by which they are governed.

The organisations pointed out that health services – like social services – are not provided within the ‘normal’ supplier-consumer relationship and that a personalised, integrated response to differing needs is necessary to guarantee the protection of human rights. CSC and Eurodiaconia are concerned that an undifferentiated application of market rules would further marginalise the most vulnerable. They urge the European Commission and the EU Member States to ensure that cross-border mobility does not generate problems of accessibility to quality health services for patients.

Furthermore, in relation to cross-border provision of services, special awareness ought to be paid to ethical questions. Given the divergent legal and ethical framework in each of the now 27 Member States, for example in relation to assisted procreation, medicines and euthanasia, genetic diagnostics and therapies, the EU legislation should carefully take into account the principle of subsidiarity. No Member State should be urged to support or refund medical treatments or therapeutical applications or health care services, which do not conform to its national ethical and legal norms.

The full statement is available here:

<http://www.ceckek.org/pdf/HealthServices0107.pdf>

Human Rights

EU Human Rights Agency is about to be opened

In December 2006 the European Union reached an agreement on the establishment of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. The Agency should be operational at the beginning of March 2007.

The new Agency will focus on fundamental rights in the area of Community law. The Agency will be a centre of expertise on fundamental rights, advising the Union and its Member States on how to better implement fundamental rights related to the Union legislation and other Union activities. One of its functions is to publish an annual report on the state of fundamental rights in the European Union. However, it will not monitor the state of fundamental rights in individual Member States. The Agency will also continue to the work of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia.

In the fields of police and judicial cooperation on criminal matters, the mandate of the Agency is only based on voluntary consultation. The Council, European Parliament and Commission as well as the Member States may consult the Agency on related questions. The Council is committed to reviewing the Agency's mandate in these areas by the end of 2009.

The candidate countries may participate in the work of the Agency as observers, and the Agency's mandate can be extended to them, if the relevant Association Council so decides. Similarly, the Council may decide to invite the Western Balkan countries to participate in the Agency's work.

In its work, the Agency will, to a rather large extent, depend upon support from civil society. For that reason, a special body called the Fundamental Rights Forum will be set up to act as a link between the Agency and NGOs.

The establishment and work of the Agency for Fundamental Rights will not affect the Council of Europe's position as the primary source and interpreter of European human rights standards.

Ecumenical News

Decade to Overcome Violence

The Europe Focus of the World Council of Churches initiated the Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010) was launched in Lutherstadt-Wittenberg on 17 February. The meeting in Wittenberg was the final preparatory gathering prior to the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, Romania on 4-9 September.

Nine key issues to be addressed by European churches and others during this year are human trafficking, youth, migration, militarisation, domestic and interpersonal violence, human security, the environment, violence in the church and a theology of a just peace.

More details on the Decade to Overcome Violence are available at www.overcomingviolence.org

More details on the Third European Ecumenical Assembly are available at www.eea3.org

Publications

ECEN has published three new documents

The European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) has published a booklet entitled "Time for God's Creation", which provides assistance with texts for liturgical celebration of God's creation. The document also contains a summary of the most relevant documents calling Churches and Christians in Europe to celebrate creation and to see it as a part of God's plan in the context of the 21st century. The publication is available in 3 languages (English, French and German).

The electronic version is available on the ECEC website. Printed copies can be purchased from the ECEN office.

There is a general need for a spiritual answer for the current environmental crises. "Spirituality, Creation and the Ecology of the Eucharist" contributes to responding to

that desire by examining the link between care for creation and Christian spirituality. The document is a collection of the texts presented at the international conference convened by ECEN at the John Knox Reformed Centre in Geneva in April 2006. It was prepared in close cooperation with the Centre. The book can be ordered from the ECEN office for a price of 8 €.

The ECEN publication "Environmental management in European Churches" is a collection of good practices of churches around Europe in taking care for environment. The copies of this publication are available in the ECEN office. The electronic version is available also on the ECEN website.

The above-presented ECEN publications are the network's contribution to the preparation of the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu.

ECEN website: <http://www.ecen.org/>
To contact the ECEN office, write to ecen@cec-kek.be.

A Common Vision for a Social Europe

In November 2005, the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC of CEC) and Eurodiaconia held a joint Conference entitled "A common vision for a social Europe - towards quality of life for all". The event gathered some 60 participants from churches and diaconal organisations in Europe. Besides the former EU Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, Anna Diamantopoulou, the Swedish Archbishop Karl Gustav Hammar and Director Georg-Friedrich Hammer from the Diaconal Foundation, Stiftung Friedehorst, many church practitioners provided their views and experiences regarding Social Europe. The conference reader presents the keynote speeches of the conference and a number of regional and national presentations. It is now available at the CEC website: www.cec-kek.org. Hard copies can be ordered at csc@cec-kek.be

Order CEC Press Releases

If you would like to receive electronically the Press Releases of the Conference of European Churches, please send an e-mail to the Communications Office of CEC: press@cec-kek.org. Approximately 50 press releases are issued each year.

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Europe Updates are now on-line

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