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CSC Update on European Affairs

TOPICS COVERED:

Constitutional debate, intercultural dialogue, London conference on values, religion and identity, the Council of Europe relations with churches, churches address the challenges of the working life

European Integration

Constitutional debate

At the anniversary Summit in Berlin on 25 March 2007, the President of the European Council Angela Merkel redefined her wishes concerning the timeline of the constitutional process and appealed on the EU Member States to agree on the Treaty by the end of this year. That would mean that a short Intergovernmental Conference would be held under the Portuguese presidency in the second half of 2007.

In relation to the views expressed about the Constitutional Treaty, there are some interesting news and rumours. The likely next UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown publicly indicated that contrary to his labelling as a Euro-sceptic, he is willing to cooperate at the European level. Furthermore, according to some interpretations, the demand of the Dutch government for a new clearly different treaty is more of a gesture vis-à-vis the Dutch citizens, and in reality they would be willing to approve most of its core content. However - at least officially - the Dutch authorities remain firm behind their present request. They also stated that the Netherlands is not supporting the Charter for Fundamental Rights as a part of the Treaty. The Dutch authorities would most favour amending existing treaties instead of creating a new one.

Also Poland remains tough on the matter insisting that it cannot accept the current treaty proposal especially due to the changes it would bring to the Council voting. Poland's own proposal for the revision of Council voting is that each Member State would get votes based on the square root of its population. This would mean, for example, that Germany with 82 million people would get 9 votes and Poland with its 38 million inhabitants 6. The qualified majority would require 14 countries out of 27 and 62% of votes. In the current draft, the qualified majority requires 55% of Member States and 65% of the population. Poland also demands a reference to Christianity but according to Angela Merkel, despite also her personal support for that reference, it is unlikely to be incorporated into the text.

Many eyes are now turned towards France, which holds the first round of its presidential elections on Sunday 22 April (the second round, if needed, would take place on 6 May). The right-wing candidate, Nicolas Sarkozy, wants the EU countries to adopt a simplified functional treaty. The Centrist candidate, François Bayrou, also supports the idea of "a simple and readable text". The Socialist candidate, Ségolène Royal, has not widely commented on the question but has requested social and workers' rights to be better taken on board. None of the three main candidates rejects the idea of a two-speed Europe where only part of the Member States would adopt the new treaty. Royal supports an EU-wide referendum, which would be linked with the next EP elections in 2009. Sarkozy wishes to see the treaty ratified through national parliaments only.

At the European Parliament, the Committee on Constitutional Affairs is discussing a report by Elmar Brok (EPP-DE) and Baron Crespo (PES-ES) on a roadmap for the Union's constitutional process. This will be Parliament's last contribution to the June European Council and to the Intergovernmental Conference.

For more detailed information on the Constitutional debate (by mid-March), please read the CSC report at: <http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/ReportConstitutionalDebate2007.pdf>.

Intercultural Dialogue

Churches are invited to take part in the Council of Europe consultation on intercultural dialogue

As already announced in previous Europe Updates (Nr 4 and 6) the Council of Europe (CoE) is preparing a White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, due to be published in November 2007. Because churches and church-related organisations in Europe are actively involved in intercultural dialogue, it is important for the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) to take part in this process. Intercultural dialogue will also be the main theme of this year's plenary meeting of the Church and Society Commission of CEC.

In the framework of the White Paper process, the CoE has issued a consultation document which includes both a general questionnaire as well as sets of questions

specifically addressed to churches and religious communities and to migrants' organisations. In addition, the CoE provides a template for handing-in "examples of good practice".

CEC and CCME are currently working on a joint response to those questionnaires. The members of both organisations are invited to send their input to andrea.hauser@cec-kek.fr by 10 May 2007. Besides answers to the questions posed in the questionnaire, we would be interested in receiving any documents which your church/organisation has issued on intercultural dialogue, as well as examples of good practice. An ad-hoc task force meeting to work on the joint response is scheduled to take place in Brussels on 11-12 May.

You will find a CEC-CCME briefing paper on the consultation process attached to this Update.

Consultation Document including the general questionnaire:

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/Source/Consultation_document_EN.pdf

Questionnaire addressed to religious communities:

<http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/Source/Questionnaire%20EN%20060307.doc>

Questionnaire addressed to NGOs working with migrants or on migration issues:

<http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/Source/Questionnaire%20EN%20260307.doc>

Template for best practices:

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/proposal_EN.asp#TopOfPage

European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 – call for proposals is now open

In the framework of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008, the Commission has launched two calls for proposals with the deadline of 31 July 2007.

The call (DG EAC/07/2007) is targeted at co-financing a limited number of emblematic actions on a **European scale** aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue. These actions may consist of specific events and activities which will raise awareness of the objectives of the European Year and underline the meaning and importance of intercultural dialogue. Actions targeted towards young people are particularly welcome. This grant, which may cover up to 80% of total costs, will be awarded to approximately 8 to 10 projects.

The call (DG EAC/08/2007) is open for actions on a **national scale with a strong European dimension**, with particular attention being given to actions relating to civic education and learning to appreciate other people and their differences. This grant, which may cover up to 50% of total costs, will be awarded to 27 projects (one per

Member State). Eligibility for this Call is restricted to the national coordinating bodies responsible for the coordination of the Year 2008 in each Member State.

Further information is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/dialogue/calls_en.html

Commission website for intercultural dialogue:

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/dialogue/dialogue_en.html

Churches met in London to discuss values

As a follow-up to the church leaders' conference "Values - Religion - Identity" which took place in Brussels in December 2006 (for the report and outcomes, see Update No 3), a conference under the same heading was held in London on 15 March 2007. A specific element for this event was its focus on the particular UK experience with multiethnic, multicultural and interfaith communication as a distinct contribution to the European discussion on values and identities.

The near 40 participants of the conference appreciated the keynote presentation by the Bishop of Rochester (Church of England), Dr. Michael Nazir. Bishop Nazir underlined that: "when there is a crisis, politicians raise the importance of values". Bishop Nazir made an interesting distinction between "thin" and "thick" values: "there are *thin* values (tolerance, democracy, rule of law) but for a real work with communities, *thick* values (inherent human dignity, equality of human beings, freedom and safety from harm [shalom; salaam; salvation]) are needed". The crucial question is, as he formulated it: "what have these issues to do with the polity of Europe now emerging?"

The second keynote presentation was delivered by the Imam Dr. A. Sajid, representing the Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony. According to Imam Sajid the politicians will only be effective in dealing with crucial today's problems if they are aware of the moral dimension. Imam Sajid also stressed the strong need for a dialogue between religions and politics as well as a dialogue between religions. He reminded us that "Europe would be the poorer if Muslims are excluded".

The conference underlined the need for the churches not only to maintain a theoretical discussion on values but to come up with concrete contributions to the debate, which are gained on the basis of daily field work. Here, practical examples of the churches' involvement in intercultural dialogue, e.g. work with migrant communities, social integration, relations to other faith groups, truly enriched the conference. Another message put forward was the need of intercultural learning. Furthermore, the conference confirmed the need to expand the understanding of integration in Europe, which is often narrowed to the political dimension and the EU enlargement. Social inclusiveness, intercultural and interfaith dialogue need to play a substantial role in that process.

Council of Europe and churches

Besides the consultation process regarding intercultural dialogue (see the article above), there are currently several other developments within the Council of Europe which directly relate to churches and church-related organisations and to religions in general.

The development of an “open, transparent and regular dialogue” between the Council of Europe and churches

Since the 2005 Council of Europe Summit, intercultural dialogue including its religious dimension has been one of the organisation’s political priorities. On 30 March, the Church and Society Commission (CSC) representatives had their second appointment with the Ambassador Ter Stepanian, chairperson of the CoE’s highest decision-making body, the Committee of Ministers (CM), concerning CoE’s dialogue with churches and religious communities.

According to Ambassador Stepanian, a consensus is being developed about having a one-off yearly meeting on a specific theme linked to the values and principles of the CoE. The aim of such an event would be to enhance stakeholder involvement. The final decision on this is expected for the CM meeting on 10-11 May. In concrete terms, the decision would mean that a first experimental meeting would be held in the spring of 2008. It would be followed by an evaluation to conclude whether the CoE continues along the priorily agreed lines or not.

It is now foreseen that, in addition to representatives of CoE member states’ governments and parliaments, churches and religious communities and the “civil society” (INGOs, Academics, Media) would share among them an equal amount of chairs. Mr Stepanian and many other CoE representatives recognise CSC-CEC as an important partner. However, the CM does not want to give the impression that the CoE is trying to organise theological discussions or inter-religious dialogue. It is clear that this does not fall within its mandate.

The CSC Strasbourg office has been actively involved in the process. On 23-24 April it will attend the San Marino Conference where the project of a more structured dialogue will be presented and discussed. In addition to CEC members, the Intereuropean Commission on Church and School (ICCS) and the Co-Ordinating Group for RE (religious education) in Europe (COGREE) are close partners of our Strasbourg office on this particular topic.

PACE President: Churches should be granted an official status with the Council of Europe

On the side of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), its President, René van der Linden, proposed to grant churches official status with the Council of Europe. According to van der Linden, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue is the only way of ensuring long-term peace and stability in Europe and the rest of the world. He considers the personal contribution of religious leaders of extreme importance and highly symbolic for promoting tolerance, respect and solidarity. It is for this reason that he believes that the Council of Europe's legal and political action should be strengthened through co-operation with churches and other religious organisations. Mr van der Linden will attend the 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu on 4-9 September 2007.

Council of Europe is looking for a way to address challenges of multi-religious societies

Governments of the Council of Europe Member States are increasingly aware of new human rights conflicts arising within a multicultural, and especially a multi-religious, society. In order to better prepare European countries to handle such matters, the question is now being discussed at the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts for Development of Human Rights (DH-DEV).

CSC was invited to two meetings of the expert committee. The meetings were devoted to the theme of **Human Rights in a Multicultural Society**. Two topics within the broad theme were selected for particular attention: **hate speech** and the **wearing of religious symbols in public areas**. Working parties on those two topics drew up reports which have now been made public on the website of the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH). The reports of the two working parties are almost entirely descriptive in character. They do not make recommendations about government policy and practice but they do contain extensive and useful analyses of the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), other relevant Council of Europe and international standards, and information about examples of good practice in various member States.

Following consideration by the CDDH of the suggestions made by the DH-DEV for possible further work on those topics, the next stage of the process is likely to include the following elements:

- drawing up "manuals", based on the working party reports, on how to handle those two aspects of human rights in a multicultural society; and
- a seminar bringing in religious groups, media and civil society.

A few countries would like to go even further and draw up a Declaration of Principles or even a Recommendation, but most consider this to be premature. At present, the reports give little basis for recommendations on visible religious symbols because there

is such a diversity of national views and practice (and indeed the Court of Human Rights recognises that this is an area where States have a broad “margin of appreciation”). Hate speech in general is already the subject of Council of Europe recommendations.

Employment Policies

Churches address the challenges of the working life

The Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC-CEC), the Churches’ Commission of Migrants in Europe (CCME) and the European Contact Group (ECG) jointly issued a response to EU’s Green Paper on “Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century”.

In their statement, European churches and church-related organisations working in the area of employment and migration express concern about the ongoing high level of unemployment in the European Union, the increasing segmentation of the labour market, with more and more precarious employment situations and the growing marginalisation of specific groups such as long-term unemployed, less skilled people, people with disabilities, single parent families, ethnic minorities and people with a migration background.

The organisations fear that the current situation provides a fundamental challenge to the functioning of the social systems and is a fertile ground for extremism and intolerance in society. They, therefore, welcome the European Commission’s initiative to open the discussion on the modernisation of labour law and a mutual supportive combination of security and flexibility in European societies with the intention to provide full employment, labour productivity and social cohesion. However, they remind the Institutions that for the churches and church-related organisations, work is not just a productive factor but a central element of human personality and participation in society, which should be organised with full respect for human dignity.

CEC, CCME and ECG emphasise the link between job security and the motivation and productivity of workers. They encourage the EU to support the implementation of existing worker’s rights and a more flexible apportionment between work and family and social life. They invite the EU to create a “high-risk investment fund” for business start-ups and to properly address basic rights for migrants. They also draw attention to the high number of people working without a sufficient income. At the same time, they wish the EU to acknowledge that, due to the diversity of Member States, single European models to address the challenges are highly unlikely to be commonly successful.

The full statement is available at:

<http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/002507answertogreenpaperlabourlaw.pdf>

Upcoming events

16 May, Brussels: European Parliament. Conference "*POLITIS: Building Europe with New Citizens? An inquiry into civic participation of naturalised citizens and foreign residents in 25 countries*" organised by the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe.

E-mail: alessia.passarelli@ccme.be

23-28 May, Rome: Conference "*If I were a migrant ... Youth perspectives on migration and integration of migrants in societies.*" Organised by the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), the World Student Christian Federation and the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy. E-mail: alessia.passarelli@ccme.be

6-10 June, Cologne, Germany: The Kirchentag. Website: www.kirchentag.de

14-17 June, Corrymeela, Northern Ireland: Church and Peace International Conference.
Email: IntlOffice@church-and-peace.org

15-19 June, Etchmiadzin, Armenia: Annual plenary meeting of CEC's Church and Society Commission.

23 June - 7 July, Dunblane, Scotland: Scottish Churches House Theological Summer School in cooperation with the Institute for Global Church Studies. Website: www.scottishchurcheshouse.org



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