



Conference of European Churches
Conférence des Églises Européennes
Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen

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Update on European Affairs

Churches in Europe

Church leaders meet to discuss European values

“The spiritual heritage of Christianity constitutes an empowering source of inspiration and enrichment for Europe. Religion is a living and constructive factor of public life”. So said some 60 church leaders from all over Europe, meeting on 12-13 December 2006 in Brussels, at the invitation of the Church & Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC-CEC). At the close of the meeting participants approved an “Open Letter from Church Leaders to Political Leaders in Europe”.

The meeting took place on the eve of the German Presidency of the G8 and the EU, which will be of high significance for the continuing debate on the future of Europe in a global context. The open letter from church leaders is a contribution to the "Berlin Declaration", which the EU Member States, the European Parliament and the Commission will adopt on 25 March 2007, as well as to the debate on the future of the EU Constitutional Treaty. The Declaration is meant to inspire hope in the future of Europe and to reiterate the commitment to European values and ambitions.

The church leaders, on the way to the Third European Ecumenical Assembly (Sibiu, Romania, 4-9 September 2007) stated: “We want to share with you, the political leaders of Europe, our concerns and hopes for the future of Europe and our role within it. In particular, our conviction is that the European integration process must continue, based on shared values and common vision”. “As people from different cultures and traditions in Europe come closer together, we want to highlight the importance of inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue.”

The letter is available at: <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/openletter13.shtml>
For more information on the conference, visit: www.cec-kek.org

European Integration

Costs of the non-Constitution

On 22 November 2006 the Swedish Vice-President of the Commission, Margot Wallström, boosted the debate on the future of the Constitutional Treaty by presenting a report entitled "The cost of the non-Constitution". The document presents the improvements that the Constitutional Treaty would have brought to our institutional framework, if it had been in force, as originally foreseen.

In relation to issues of interest for churches, the document argues the following:

The incorporation of **the Charter of Fundamental Rights** into the Constitution would provide the European Union with a set of fundamental rights which would be legally binding on the Union institutions and on the Member States whenever they implement Union law.

Furthermore, by enshrining the Union's **legal personality**, the Constitution would authorize the Union to conclude and accede to international agreements including **the European Convention on Human Rights**.

The Constitution would bring **asylum and immigration, police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, border controls and visas** under a single heading as well as widen the scope of qualified majority voting. These measures would enable more enhanced EU level co-operation in the field of Freedom, Security and Justice.

In the area of **human health**, the Constitution would bring some improvements, by introducing a provision which would allow the Union to legislate whenever common safety and security issues are involved. This extends to the safety of medicinal products and to the fight against cross-border threats such as epidemics, chemical accidents and bio-terrorism.

The Constitution would introduce a horizontal clause, which demands the Union to take into account the requirements of a **high level of employment, proper social protection and combating social exclusion** when defining and implementing its policies.

The Constitution would also enhance **participatory democracy** as it introduces "the Citizens' initiative", whereby the Commission could be petitioned for action if a million signatures were collected.

The Constitution would reinforce democratic legitimacy of the Union by the **extension of co-decision**, the enhancement of the involvement of **national parliaments** and the redefinition of **qualified majority**.

The report is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/wallstrom/pdf/final_report_21112006_en.pdf

Next steps relating to the Constitutional Treaty

The German Presidency will continue the consultation process started during the Finnish Presidency with all EU partners and institutions in order to present a roadmap and a method for achieving an institutional settlement. An idea has also been presented to organise a conference among those Member States that have ratified the Treaty with a view of elaborating a common strategy in relation to those countries that have not ratified it.

Commissioner Wallström has said she considers that the Member States whose citizens have not approved the ratification have a special responsibility in signalling how it would be possible to solve the impasse. Furthermore, she believes that the political substance of the Constitutional Treaty should be preserved as much as possible and disapproves the plans regarding a Mini-Treaty, only related to a few institutional changes. However, she has warned about being overambitious and stated that "Europe deserves a second chance, but it could not afford a second failure".

The CSC-CEC continues to take an active part in the process. In September it published its latest contribution to the debate. The document concludes: "The Conference of European Churches commits itself to contribute to the construction of a Europe in which we can feel at home and can be proud of. Churches together with their related organisations and agencies are ready to be the partners of the European political institutions in an effort to contribute to the developing of a Europe that is not only prosperous and democratic, but also sustainable, trustworthy for its partners and supported by its citizens. The identity of Europe and the Union should be based on values reaching beyond the economic sphere and rooted in our history and traditions."

The full statement is available at: <http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/FutureofEurope.pdf>

Priorities of the German EU Presidency

Besides the clear intention to foster the constitutional process, the priorities of the German Presidency seem manifold. The Presidency Programme entitled "Europe –succeeding together" refers to the viability of the European economic and social model, the area of freedom, security and justice and the expansion of the European area of security and stability. Also energy, climate change, research & innovation, migration, Kosovo and the enlargement policy feature high up in the official statements of the German Government.

There are no signs for revitalising of the social dimension of the Lisbon Strategy. However, it appears that the Presidency is making a serious effort to boost EU's efforts in combating environmental pollution and climate change. It, for example, aims to negotiate a common EU stance on international climate protection after the current commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol ends in 2012. In the area of migration policies, the focus continues to be on fighting illegal migration and on fostering integration of immigrants. The Presidency sees intercultural

and interfaith dialogue as a crucial aspect of integration and as a way to prevent anti-Semitism, extremism and xenophobia.

The Presidency Programme is available at:

<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/de/EU-P/Programm-EU-P-en.pdf>

CSC-CEC and COMECE will have their regular meeting with the Presidency in January.

EKD (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland), together with its ecumenical partners, is preparing a national level contribution regarding the German Presidency. The document will be published on the eve of the Presidency at www.ekd.de.

Social Policies

Green Paper on labour law

The European Commission has launched a public debate 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 the Member States, social partners and other stakeholders how labour law at EU and national level can help the job market to become more flexible while maximising security for workers (the 'flexicurity' approach). The consultation seeks views on 14 specific questions covering the much debated flexicurity approach, flexible and inclusive labour markets, employment transitions, a life-cycle approach to work, temporary agency work, working time, mobility of workers and undeclared work.

The consultation period will run till 31 March 2007 and its contributions will feed in the upcoming Commission communication on flexicurity in June 2007.

CSC-CEC will prepare a statement. Members are invited to send in their comments to Rev. Dr. Dieter Heidtmann (dht@cec-kek.be) till 20 February.

The Green Paper and more information on the consultation process are available at:

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

Services Directive

On 15 November, the European Parliament adopted the Directive on Services in the Internal Market. The Services Directive is creating a legal framework in order to eliminate obstacles to the freedom of establishment for service providers and the free movement of services between the Member States.

In the course of the Second Reading, the exclusion of social and health services was of special interest for churches and church-related organisations. The final text states that healthcare is exempted from the scope of the Directive "whether or not it is provided via healthcare

facilities; and regardless of the ways in which it is organised and financed at national level or whether it is public or private” It also states that “social services relating to social housing, childcare and support in the areas of housing, childcare and support to families and persons in need which are provided by the State, by providers mandated by the State or by charities recognised as such by the State” will be excluded from the scope of the Directive.

The Church & Society Commission of CEC welcomed a declaration of the European Commission, which clarified that social services provided by churches and church organisations would fall under this exclusion clause. However, as healthcare services and social services are not treated equally, CSC-CEC remains concerned whether the Directive might lead to legal lack of clarity in those areas where a combination of activities is needed (e.g. rehabilitation measures). The EU Member States will now have three years to transmit the Services Directive into national law. The churches will have to monitor these national processes very carefully.

Migration

Churches plea for human treatment of deportees

On 29-30 November 2006, 40 persons of African origin were deported from the EU area to Cameroon and Togo. The “EU Charters”, joint operations between EU member states in the removal of foreigners without residence permit, have become increasingly frequent in recent years and are partly financed by the preparatory action of an EU return fund. The Brussels-based Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) has in this context expressed concern about the lack of common EU standards regarding the human rights of deportees.

With regard to this particular case, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) stated that the huge number of observers and police officers (3 per deportee) that were apparently accompanying the deportees was a declaration that these persons were dangerous criminals by countries where they had sought asylum. Furthermore, whilst conceding that it is the right of every country under the UN Charter to admit or not to admit non-citizens into its country, AACC reminded the governments that deportation of economic migrants will not be solved by intimidating exercises, such as the one in question.

The AACC considers development as the only way to tackle illegal migration. For example, skill impacting programmes for persons of African origin who are to be deported would improve their possibilities to be gainfully employed on returning home, and, therefore, reduce the likelihood that they would seek a new entry route into Europe. In addition, the programmes would create an avenue through which deportees could be monitored upon return.



Church and Society Commission

Rue Joseph II, 174
1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel. +32 2 230 17 32
Fax +32 2 231 14 13
www.cec-kek.org

For further information on the issues, please contact Ms Elina Eloranta (elo@cec-kek.be).
To subscribe or unsubscribe, please send an e-mail to csc@cec-kek.be.