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TOPICS COVERED:

Churches and Hungarian EU Presidency; Danube Strategy; Poverty, Wealth and Ecology; CSC/CEC-CLAI dialogue on globalisation; stock-taking of nuclear disarmament in 2010; fighting poverty in Finland, Sweden and the EU; time to reflect on the ethics of human enhancement; call for support in developing a European syllabus for Protestant religion; how to launch a citizens' initiative; churches urge the EU to act in the face of Christian persecution; EU accession to European Convention on Human Rights; upcoming events.

HUNGARIAN EU PRESIDENCY

Churches meet with the Hungarian EU Presidency

On 17 January 2011, a delegation of Hungarian and European church representatives was received by the Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán in Budapest. The Prime Minister was accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén and the Secretaries of State Mihály Varga, Peter Szíjjártó, Zoltán Balog and László Szászfalvi as well as by several advisers.

Among the specific topics which the delegation of church representatives raised were questions with regard to family policies, the situation of the Roma communities in Europe, the implementation of religious freedom (see the article further below) and the EU Danube Strategy (more below). Topics also included the social dimension in European policies and, in particular, in relation to the implementation of the EU 2020 Strategy.

Prime Minister Orbán welcomed the active engagement of the churches with the Hungarian Government during the forthcoming 6 months and beyond. He asked the churches for their support in bringing all European governments and societies to recognise that the integration of Roma communities should be a European, and not just a national commitment of some European governments. It will only be possible to improve the living conditions of Roma throughout Europe if all European governments cooperate.

As one of the priorities of the Hungarian EU Presidency is to bring Europe closer to its citizens, the church representatives emphasised the involvement of civil society at large, as well as of religious communities, in particular in the decision-making process on the European level. In his response Prime Minister Orbán encouraged the churches to maintain their important role as bridge builders, as churches are organised on the local, national and regional level and could, therefore, bring the "voice of the people" to the institutions.

The meeting on 17 January marked the starting point for a dialogue between the churches and the Hungarian EU Presidency. The churches used the occasion to present their programme which will accompany the Presidency in the first half of 2011.

The churches' delegation for the meeting with the Prime Minister reflected the plurality of churches in the Hungarian context. Under the leadership of Péter Cardinal Erdö (Roman-Catholic), Bishop Dr.

Gusztáv Bölcskei (Reformed) and the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary, the delegation included representatives from the Roman-Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist and Orthodox Churches in Hungary. Due to the specific tradition in Hungary, the delegation also included representatives from the Jewish community. The European church bodies were represented by Rev. Rüdiger Noll, Director of the Church and Society Commission (CSC) of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), and the General Secretary of the Commission of Bishops' Conferences in the European Community (COMECE), Fr. Piotr Mazurkiewicz.

The priorities of the Hungarian EU Presidency focus on four main topics: growth and employment in order to preserve the European social model; stronger Europe; citizen-friendly Union; enlargement and neighbourhood policy.

Programme of the Hungarian Presidency:

<http://www.eu2011.hu/document/programme-hungarian-presidency>

Hungarian Churches active in the Hungarian EU Presidency

The Reformed Church in Hungary and other members of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary (ECCH) are taking an active role in the Hungarian EU Presidency. The churches are planning a number of initiatives including cultural and professional events, conferences and thematic forums.

Marking the commitment of Hungarian churches to support the Hungarian Government during the Presidency, the opening worship of this year's Ecumenical Prayer Week on 16 January in Budapest was dedicated to the opening of the Hungarian Presidency. The worship was attended by high-level representatives of the Hungarian Government and international ecumenical partners with which the churches will co-operate during the Presidency. Following that event, Hungarian churches and representatives of CSC and COMECE met with the Hungarian EU Presidency (see article above).

In a joint endeavour, the member churches of ECCH issued a Presidency booklet entitled "In Community for Europe", which summarizes the values and professional principles of the cooperation between the Government and churches in Hungary. An Events Calendar, listing the main programs to be organised by ECCH, is also included in the booklet. These events are intended to assist the Hungarian Government by offering policy recommendations and background analyses. For example, in the field of Roma integration, the Reformed Church in Hungary is planning an international Roma Missionary conference to be held in June in order to promote sharing of best practices and to raise the awareness of both the public and members of congregations.

Furthermore, the Reformed Church in Hungary launched an EU Presidency website in order to keep its partners informed about its activities both within and outside Hungary. The website provides information on planned projects as well as reports and articles on past events. Visitors can also find background material outlining the Church's point of view on various topics, such as Roma Mission, the social responsibilities of the EU or cultural diversity in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

According to the Hungarian Government, a distinctive feature of its EU Presidency is that the semester's activities are strongly focused on the cultural aspects. The Reformed Church in Hungary, in cooperation with the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary, the Foundation Reconciliation in South-East Europe and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, will contribute to that priority with a major conference in Budapest in March, aimed at discussing the role of CEE churches in reconciliation and the healing of memories.

The English website of the Reformed Church in Hungary is located at:

<http://refeu2011.reformatus.hu/en>. The joint Presidency booklet is available there.

Hungarian Presidency discusses the Danube Strategy

On 8 December 2010, the European Commission issued its proposal for the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. The Strategy takes the form of a Communication by the Commission and an Action Plan. While the Communication serves as the basic reference document, the Action Plan will be reviewed frequently. The Strategy is now discussed among Member States. The Hungarian EU Presidency expects it to be adopted at the June 2011 meeting of the European Council. The Danube Strategy covers 8 EU member countries (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic,

Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania) and 6 non-EU countries (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Ukraine and Moldova).

CSC together with the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and COMECE made a submission leading up to the development of the Danube Strategy in which the churches emphasized inter-cultural dialogue, reconciliation and healing of memories as important issues in the region (see Europe Update N° 31). In addition, the submission called upon the European Union to provide for the involvement of churches in the region in the implementation of human rights and in environmental protection. The Communication of the European Commission and the Action Plan, however, emphasize very little inter-cultural dialogue and reconciliation. The churches are only mentioned once in the Action Plan in relation to minority issues. Instead, the 11 priority issues included in the Strategy mostly relate to economic developments, energy and security issues.

CSC and COMECE discussed the Danube Strategy with the Hungarian EU Presidency in the meeting on 17 January 2011 (see above). The Prime Minister and the church representatives agreed on the need for strengthening reconciliation and inter-cultural dialogue as important elements of cooperation between governments and civil society in the Danube region.

CSC will continue to follow the further developments on the Danube Strategy as well as to maintain the dialogue with the EU Presidency on this issue. It will also contact its member churches in order to facilitate their involvement. It would be important for CEC member churches in these countries to approach their respective governments to seek involvement in the further development and implementation of the Danube Strategy. An ideal result could be a joint initiative of as many churches as possible in the region in the framework of the Danube Strategy. CSC is part of an informal Working Group in Brussels on the Danube Strategy, which is convened by the Representation of Baden-Württemberg in Brussels.

The EU documents and more information is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/index_en.htm

As the process is now with the Council for discussion and decision-taking, up to date information is best available on the Hungarian Presidency website (use the search engine):

<http://www.eu2011.hu/>

GLOBALISATION

Economic growth cannot be an aim in itself

A consultation on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Europe was one of the highlights of CSC/CEC activities in 2010. The meeting took place on 8-12 November in Budapest. It provided a European contribution to the world-wide process of consultations initiated by the last Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Porto Alegre in 2006. The thematic focus of the consultation was the discussion of the links between wealth creation, permanence of poverty and environmental degradation. A particular emphasis was put on environmental aspects playing an increasing role in the complex relationship between economic and social agendas.

The final statement of the consultation underlines that the pursuit of unlimited wealth in rich industrialized countries of Europe often impoverishes communities and harms creation as a whole. The document stresses that "climate justice, and therefore both social and ecological values, should be a central goal of policy-making" and, furthermore, that "in industrialized countries economic growth should no longer be seen as an aim in itself." The consultation calls for "the redistribution of wealth and sharing of technology between rich countries and poor countries affected by climate change" as "crucial elements of climate justice". This should go along with "additional support for climate change mitigation and adaptation." In relation to the European Union, the churches' statement asks the EU to live up to its ambitions with regard to reducing greenhouse gas emissions independent of policies by other large economies. At the same time, it challenges the EU to take additional steps to tackle poverty and social exclusion, including among marginalized migrant communities.

Discussions at the consultation reflected the high importance given to these topics in a number of churches in Europe. Particularly encouraging was the vital presence of the young delegates, representing the youth partner organisations of CEC: the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE), the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) and Syndesmos. The consultation

supported a proposal of the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) for a joint preparation of a global ecumenical justice conference. That conference should propose a framework and criteria for a new international financial and economic architecture based on the principles of economic, social and climate justice. The Budapest gathering also invited WCC to put climate justice high on the agenda of its 10th Assembly in Busan, South Korea, in 2013.

Full text of the Budapest Call for Climate Justice:

http://www.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/cec/CEC_Documents/Press_Release_Attachments/Budapest_Final_Call.pdf

Full text of the youth statement from the consultation:

http://www.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/cec/CEC_Documents/Press_Release_Attachments/Youth_statement_Budapest.pdf

CSC/CEC–CLAI dialogue on globalisation

The CSC/WCC consultation in Budapest in November (see above) was preceded by the last meeting of the joint CSC/CEC–CLAI Task Force on globalisation. The Europeans felt honoured to welcome in Europe for the second time in 2010 the delegation of the CLAI led by its President, Bishop Julio Murray. The meeting took stock of the previous meetings of that group and worked on the finalisation of the joint CSC/CEC -CLAI document. It also discussed, in particular, developments in Central Europe including the current challenges in economic and social transformation. For all Latin American members of the Task Force it was the first opportunity to be in one of the post-communist countries of Europe and to get first-hand experience of the life and history of this part of the continent. The group in its present composition has now completed its work. But on both sides, CSC/CEC as well as CLAI, the respective decision-making bodies have already expressed the wish to continue the dialogue. On the CSC/CEC side, both the final document and the future of the dialogue will be further discussed at the upcoming meeting of the CSC Executive Committee in February 2011. The provisional proposal for the next meeting of the new CSC/CEC–CLAI Task Force is that it would take place in May 2011.

NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

Progress or regress in nuclear disarmament in 2010?

In January 2007, four former US statesmen (incl. Henry Kissinger) argued in the Wall Street Journal that nuclear deterrence was becoming an increasingly hazardous and ineffective method to counter security threats. Their plea for targeting the zero option instead of merely reducing was endorsed in 2009 by the new US Administration as well as Russia. When CSC, at the beginning of 2010, launched a new process to support the efforts towards global zero several European states had indicated their willingness to rally to the cause, but neither the European Union nor NATO had clearly endorsed this goal. The churches wanted to address the European responsibility. Was anything achieved?

2010 provided Europe with two important and rare occasions to show its commitment to nuclear disarmament. The first was the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in May 2010, which every five years allows the world to either upgrade - or downgrade - its ambition. The last Review Conference five years ago had ended in a failure. Although the EU position paper - to which CSC contributed with its statement and advocacy work - turned out to be better than at previous review conferences, for instance by a more balanced approach of the three NPT 'pillars' (nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, peaceful use of nuclear energy), the EU's role in New York was marginal. Still the Review Conference itself was a modest success, by agreeing about an action plan and other steps. Five members of the CSC expert group on nuclear disarmament took part in the Review Conference.

The second milestone was the revision of NATO's new Strategic Concept. This Strategic Concept, adopted at the Lisbon Summit on 19-20 November 2010 was a disappointment to the churches. NATO did make a commitment to a world without nuclear weapons - which decision-makers hoped would satisfy churches' demands - but also states "as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear Alliance." Moreover, NATO failed to make a clear departure from its Cold War posture and did not translate its commitment to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, agreed in 2009, into new steps. However, NATO's new Strategic Concept does provide some space

for more forward-looking actions: It no longer explicitly states that there should be NATO nuclear forces stationed in Europe. In addition, at its Lisbon Summit, NATO took the decision to review NATO's defence and deterrence posture in the near future.

Whereas much of the momentum that was there at the beginning of the year to take serious steps towards nuclear disarmament was unfortunately lost in the course of the year, 2010 at least brought, after some 20 years, the topic back on the agenda, in the minds of decision-makers and citizens. The churches were among the most active contributors in this.

But clearly, nuclear weapons continue to pose a life-threatening danger and a moral dilemma. Churches have no illusions on the magnitude of the challenge to bring the number of nuclear warheads from the current 22.000 to zero but believe that with hope and concrete progressive steps this remains possible. Public support, and the support of the churches, continues to be vitally needed to make changes happen in Europe as well as worldwide. CSC enjoyed an excellent co-operation with WCC and the Dutch interchurch peace council, IKV/Pax Christi last year. There are now plans together with WCC to invite North American churches to join a common call for NATO to turn words into nuclear disarmament action.

CSC Press Release on NATO's new Strategic Concept and other CSC documents on nuclear disarmament: <http://csc.ceceurope.org/issues/nuclear-disarmament/>

SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Fighting poverty in Finland and Sweden

On 13 December 2010, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) and the Church of Sweden (CoS) in co-operation with CSC and Eurodiaconia organised a seminar in Helsinki on child poverty. It was one of the churches' contributions to the closing of the 2010 European Year on Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. The conference made it clear that even wealthy Finland and Sweden were not safe from poverty or child poverty. In fact, the number of people in this precarious condition has increased over the last decades.

In his address to the conference, the Archbishop Kari Mäkinen (ELCF) explained that in Finland shame accounts for the fact that Finnish poverty is to such a great extent invisible and silent. Yet, it exists. Poverty in the North means that in daily life cheap sausage is bought instead of meat, even travel by public transport is unaffordable, accommodation is cramped and healthcare insufficient. In their joint statement (attached to this Europe Update) issued at the conference, Archbishop Mäkinen and his fellow Archbishop Anders Wejryd (CoS), urge the decision-makers, to combat child poverty, *inter alia*, by countering the polarization in society and by improving basic social services. Even if the current economic situation is not favourable to such efforts, it would be short-sighted to cut costs at the expense of children. Archbishop Wejryd reminded the conference, which also gathered decision-makers, of the words of Jesus: "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." The archbishops' statement reads: "Every child is entitled to a good childhood filled with faith and the possibility of spiritual development, hope for a safe future and love in the form of a family that is present, time together and close relations to other adults."

Besides the interventions of the two archbishops, the conference heard addresses by the Finnish Minister of Social Affairs and Health, Juha Rehula, CSC Director, Rev. Rüdiger Noll, Secretary-General of Eurodiaconia, Heather Roy and the Bishop of Helsinki, Irja Askola. It also learned about concrete projects undertaken by churches and diaconal organisations in Sweden, Finland and other European countries to promote social inclusion.

ETHICS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Time to reflect on the ethics of human enhancement

Will we humans, sooner or later, be in a position to remodel ourselves to such an extent that we begin wondering if we are still humans in the sense we understand it today? This question sounds like science fiction. And the issue is not yet high on the political agenda within the European

institutions. However, European civil servants and politicians are increasingly aware that this topic will become more central to research and innovation in the future. The European Commission has been investigating new developments in life sciences and nanotechnologies for some years already.

In 2003, the American Bioethics Council, in a Report to the US President on the relations between biotechnology and "the pursuit of happiness", asked the question: "Is there a new society emerging without America having decided it?" In 2008, the health and safety agencies in Europe asked questions on people's growing dependence on "performance medicines". They noted a tendency of deviating use of drugs originally designed for very specific illnesses. The use of illegal substances in sports is well known, but there are other examples. Ritalin and Concerta, developed for hyperactive children, are used by people wishing to enhance their concentration capacity. Another drug, invented for the military and prescribed to insomniac patients, is used by some to remain awake for a long time. Furthermore, other drugs are misused to improve cognitive, memory or sexual performance. In all such cases, the aim is to obtain an enhancement beyond "normal" possibilities, with risks of dependence and harmful side effects.

The wish to go beyond curing, protecting or repairing the capacities of the human body is as old as humankind. Today, possibilities offered by genetics, linked to the convergence of nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive sciences (NBIC) could lead to modify genes with a view to enhance the biological performance not only of an individual, but also of his/her descendants. Therefore, the breadth and depth of ethical, social, anthropological and theological questions raised is a growing challenge to all faiths, churches, politicians, and human beings in general.

In focusing on Human Enhancement as one of the priorities of its 2011 Work Programme, CSC shows its will to be on the forefront of ethical reflection in Ethics, Science and Technology. CSC has already produced a consultation paper to which comments continue to be most welcome. Please address them to CSC Executive Secretary Rev. Richard Fischer at: csc@cec-kek.fr.

From 23 to 25 November 2011, CSC is planning to hold a European conference in Brussels in order to bring into dialogue representatives of the CEC constituency, other faiths, the industry sector and representatives of the European Institutions to further deepen the reflection on this topic.

CSC Discussion Paper on Human Enhancement:

http://csc.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/csc/Ethics_Biotechnology/Human_Enhancement_March_10.pdf

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Religious Education in European Schools – Support welcome to develop a New Syllabus for the Protestant Religion Classes

In the fourteen European Schools that exist in Europe and provide multilingual and multicultural education, the syllabuses of all the language sections are identical and subject to the same educational requirements. Only religion courses have been an exception to this rule and have been given in accordance with local syllabuses. This is now changing. In consultation with the religious authorities, the European Schools have assigned working groups composed of teachers the task to ensure coherence between the syllabuses of the religions taught in the European Schools. The intention of the revision is to ensure that the curricula correspond to the standards of high-quality modern education.

On 6 December 2010 Mr Kivinen, Deputy Secretary-General of the European Schools, brought together the coordinators of religious classes and the religious leaders in Brussels to evaluate the work done by different groups. The working groups on Orthodox religion and Catholic religion, respectively supported by the Metropolitan of Belgium, Exarchate of the Netherlands and Luxembourg "under the jurisdiction of The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople" and by COMECE, have already achieved significant advances in their work. Their projects include syllabuses related to teaching competencies. The work on the syllabus of Protestant religion, supported by the Protestant Council for Religious Education in the European Schools of Brussels, is only getting started due to some difficulties in the establishment of the working group. The December meeting decided to schedule four meetings to develop the new syllabus of Protestant

religion in the first half of 2011 and to start working with teachers of the European Schools in Brussels. The working group welcomes support by the Protestant churches concerned. Most students of the language sections in which Protestant religion classes are organized have their origins in countries of the Porvoo Churches (Porvoo Communion) or the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (CPCE).

Those interested in the process are invited to contact Rev. Volker Brandt: volker.brandt@eeb3.be, European School of Brussels III, 135, Boulevard du Triomphe, 1050 Brussels.

CITIZENS' INITIATIVE

Rules for the citizens' initiatives close to being adopted

One of the innovations of the Lisbon Treaty in fostering participatory democracy is what is called "citizens' initiative". This mechanism gives the possibility to EU citizens that are old enough to be entitled to vote in European elections, to ask the EU to introduce new legislation. On 15 December 2010, the European Parliament approved, by 628 votes against 15, a compromise text by the three EU institutions which sets the ground rules for launching such an initiative. The Council is expected to adopt these rules in February 2011. Citizens should be able to use the mechanism as of the beginning of 2012.

Several conditions must be met in order to launch a citizens' initiative. First, one must gather 7 people from at least one fourth of the EU Member States, i.e. currently from 7 different Member States, in order to create a "citizens' committee" which will be in a position to register an initiative with the European Commission. The initiative must clearly mention its title, the subject matter, the objectives and the EU treaty provisions relevant to the topic. Information must also be provided concerning any support and funding. As a second step, the Commission will check the admissibility of the demand. From the moment the Commission has listed the initiative on its public register, the organisers will have one year to collect one million signatures. Again, signatories have to come from at least one fourth of the Member States. The Commission will publish all information concerning the initiative on its website and will invite the organisers to present their initiative in a public hearing at the European Parliament. The Commission then has to give a public response on the legal and political conclusions of the initiative within three months following the submission of the signatures. Those launching an initiative are responsible for the proper handling of the signatories' personal data during the whole procedure and for destroying those data at the end of the process.

The procedure as it now stands is much more user-friendly than was initially proposed, thanks to a lot of pressure from the civil society and by number of Members of the European Parliament. The CSC regards the citizens' initiative as a useful mechanism for churches as well when it comes to conveying their concerns. For instance, there are initial plans of CSC and other organisations to use the mechanism in efforts to protect a work-free Sunday.

The regulation concerning the citizens' initiative:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2010-0480+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

HUMAN RIGHTS

EU takes recent violence against Christians seriously

The European Union is taking seriously the recent violent attacks perpetrated against Christians in Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan and Nigeria. More recently, in Alexandria, an attack on the Coptic Church on New Year's Eve killed 21 worshippers. On 20 January 2011, the European Parliament adopted a resolution addressing the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion. The European Council of 31 January is expected to discuss the violation of religious freedom with a view of adopting a more proactive policy to ensure the protection of that universal right. The EU leaders regularly condemn major atrocities but now there seems to be a political will for more concrete action. Similarly, the "47 member states of the Council of Europe strongly condemn such acts and all forms of incitement to religious hatred and violence".

CSC and COMECE have for a long time worked together for the promotion of freedom of religion. In October 2010, in the traditional meeting between the churches and the rotating EU Presidency (see Europe Update N° 34), the Belgian Prime Minister Yves Leterme agreed to convey to Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the churches' request for the EU, in the framework of the new EU External Action Service, to take a more active role in the promotion of freedom of religion in the world. The Prime Minister also agreed this to be a matter of priority in the EU's relations with Turkey. In a meeting with the Hungarian EU Presidency (see the first article above) on 17 January 2011, the Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán expressed his support for an effective response by the European Union to the persecution of Christians in third countries and envisaged such a response either by the Presidency itself or through the newly-established External Action Service of the European Union.

Besides the churches, several civil society organisations are working towards the realisation of freedom of religion or belief. In an open letter to Baroness Ashton, the European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination asked the High Representative to enable improved work in this area by, for example, establishing a permanent capacity within the Human Rights and Democracy directorate of the EEAS to undertake research, reporting and mainstreaming tasks. The Platform also called for more funding for projects aimed at promoting inter-religious reconciliation and respect for religious diversity and freedom.

The recent events call for attention on the protection of Christians, but the churches in Europe consider it important to ensure the freedom of religion for believers of all faiths, in Europe as well as in the world.

Read the European Parliament resolution at:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2011-0021&format=XML&language=EN>

Read the Council of Europe's statement on:

<https://wcd.coe.int/wcd/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1734623&Site=DC>

In 2008, CSC and COMECE organised four seminars on Islam, Christianity and Europe. You can read the event reports at: <http://csc.ceceurope.org/issues/inter-cultural>

CORRECTION: The above-mentioned article in Europe Update N° 34 on the October 2010 meeting between the churches and the Belgian EU Presidency unfortunately omitted to list Father Piotr Mazurkiewicz, Secretary General of COMECE, among the participants. We apologize for this mistake.

EU and CoE prepare the EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights

One of the positive outcomes of the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon was that it stipulated the EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights, a key Human Rights treaty of the Council of Europe. Since months the two institutions have been preparing this accession. In a joint statement by the Presidents of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and of the European Court of Justice (CJEU), issued in January, the two courts reported on the process. The issue now at stake is to decide at which stage the CJEU is involved when there is incompatibility between the Convention and the EU law. The Presidents have taken the view that a flexible procedure should be introduced so that in such cases - which should be relatively rare - the CJEU may exercise its internal review of the act in question before the ECHR exercises its external review under the Convention.

Read the European Convention on Human Rights at:

<http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=005&CL=ENG>

UPCOMING EVENTS

Initial CSC plans for the year 2011

Many of CSC's projects for this year's events are still at an early stage. The 2nd Assembly of the CALL Network is initially scheduled to take place in Bucharest on 11-13 May. The date for the consultation on human enhancement has now been set. It will be held in Brussels on 23-25 November. In addition, CSC intends to offer a Human Rights training in the Balkans late in 2011 and to organise the next meeting of Church and Society Secretaries of European Churches in the autumn, possibly in Brussels on 11-13 October.

The CSC annual Plenary meeting will take place in Brussels from 25 to 28 May.

Conference on Education in Prague on 29 June - 3 July 2011

CEC members and other interested parties are cordially invited for a European conference entitled "Employability - Mobility - Flexibility. European demands challenging Religion and Education" to be held from 29 June to 3 July in Prague.

The conference is held against the backdrop of recent international and European developments which influence national education system. Last year, the European Union adopted a "Strategic framework for European Cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020"). Although the document mentions that education should serve social cohesion, personal fulfillment and competences for living together in harmony, it, above all, emphasizes the "employability". Education and training is focused on providing "flexible skills and competencies" that serve employability, mobility and flexibility.

The event, which is expected to gather about 80 participants from all over Europe, is organised by Intereuropean Commission on Church and School (ICCS) and International Association for Christian Education (IV) in cooperation with CoGREE and together with the Hussite Theological Faculty and the Ecumenical Council of Churches/ Church Council in the Czech Republic.

For more information visit: <http://www.iccsweb.org/> or <http://www.int-v.com>

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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://csc.ceceurope.org/news/europe-updates/>

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