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Conférence des Églises Européennes
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CSC Update on European Affairs

TOPICS COVERED:

Churches and the French EU Presidency; CSC Europe Secretaries meeting; 60th anniversary of UDHR; EU Fundamental Rights Agency; rights of the child; future of the Lisbon Treaty; climate change; budget reform; religion in the public sphere; Sunday protection; poverty; intercultural dialogue; migration; upcoming CSC events.

French EU Presidency

European Churches meet the French EU Presidency

Following a now well-established tradition, representatives of the Churches in Europe - the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the Commission of Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) and churches in France - met with the EU Presidency. The delegation was received by French State Secretary for European Affairs, M. Jean-Pierre Jouyet in Paris on 22 November.

The meeting began with an exchange of views on institutional issues (the future of the EU and the Lisbon Treaty) and on the financial crisis. In view of the European Council for Justice and Home Affairs on 27 November, the delegation of Church representatives raised several issues related to refugee resettlement and the return policies in the European Union. The delegation emphasized the need for a truly common EU policy on migration and asylum, which protects the human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, and which regards integration as a two-way process, involving both migrants and host communities. The Church representatives also highlighted the dramatic situation of Iraqi Christians.

With regard to climate change, the church representatives brought witness of the contribution of Churches and Christians in helping to address this common challenge, through their reflections, examples and local initiatives. Also EU-Africa relations and Sunday protection were discussed. More about Sunday protection is written in another article of this Europe Update.

The Churches were represented at this meeting by Mgr Antoine Hérouard, Secretary General of the French Catholic Bishops Conference; Fr Arsenios Kardamakis, Ecumenical Patriarchate; Pastor Yves Parrend, Secretary General of the French Protestant Federation; H.E Christian Kratz, Auxiliary Bishop of Strasbourg; Fr Piotr Mazurkiewicz, Secretary General of COMECE and Rev Rüdiger Noll, Director of the Church and Society Commission of CEC (CSC-CEC) and Associate General Secretary of CEC.

CSC Europe Secretaries Meeting

The annual CSC Europe Secretaries meeting took place on 20-22 October in Leuven near Brussels. This year's meeting focused on examining the draft proposal for a CSC work programme 2009-2015. The revised document as well as the report on CSC activities between the CEC Trondheim Assembly of 2003 and next year's Assembly in Lyon will be part of the package of documents which CEC member churches and associated organisations will receive in December. Member Churches are invited to comment the draft work programme by 10 March 2009. The further revised documents will be subject to discussion at the Lyon Assembly in France on 15-21 July 2009 (the Assembly website: <http://assembly.ceceurope.org/>).

In this 6th edition, the Europe Secretaries meeting enabled us to learn about current developments within the CEC constituency and also proved an opportunity for the participants to have an update on current CSC projects. Here is a summary of our main projects:

CSC Working Group (WG) on European integration is working on a major document on European integration and its future perspectives. The document will be finalized for the Lyon Assembly.

CSC WG on Human Rights is in the process of drafting a human rights' manual. The first two chapters of the manual will be finalized prior to the Lyon Assembly. Information on other current human rights projects is available in this Europe Update (see below).

CSC, Aprodev, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and Eurodiaconia seek to encourage their constituencies for an active involvement in the European debate prior to the European elections on 4-7 July 2009. The campaign material will be available in January 2009 (see Europe Update N° 19).

CSC is working on the follow-up of the Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (see Europe Update N° 17) together with other Christian NGOs related to the Council of Europe.

The Conference on "Employment and the Churches in Europe" held in February 2008 (parting the framework of the Conference, a Dialogue Seminar was held on the theme of flexicurity, see Europe Update N° 15) has led to the process of establishing a Christian Employment and Economy Network. The network will be officially launched in the autumn 2009.

In a similar way, the seminar on “Churches and Socially Responsible Investment” held in May 2008 (see Europe Update N° 17) has paved the way for more church co-operation. The concrete forms of this work are now being formulated.

A new Task Force has been established to continue the dialogue between CEC and the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI). The Task Force will also facilitate the involvement of European churches in the World Council of Churches (WCC) project Wealth - Poverty - Ecology which in 2010 will focus on Europe.

The 7th Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) was held in Italy on 24-28 September (see Europe Update N° 19). The Network is coordinated by CSC.

Information on the conference “Religion in the Public Sphere - legal challenges and trends” is available in this Europe Update (see below).

The Europe Secretaries meeting included a study visit to the European Economic and Social Committee and to the Committee of Regions. The first gathers representatives of employers’ and employees’ associations and other interest representatives such as farmers and consumer organisations. The latter gathers representatives of local and regional authorities.

Parallel to the Europe Secretaries meeting, the CEC Committee for Relations with Muslims of Europe (CRME) and the Council of European Bishops’ Conferences (CCEE) organized a Christian-Muslim conference entitled “Being a Citizen of Europe and a person of Faith: Christians and Muslims as Active Partners in European Societies”. The Secretaries meeting was invited to join an evening event held as a part of that conference at the Chapel of the Resurrection.

Press Release of the CRME conference: <http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/cq0859e.pdf>

Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights turns 60 - Churches are called to commit themselves to human rights

*Just as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.
(Matthew 25, 40).*

The Church and Society Commission is preparing to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on 10 December 2008 and, herewith, invites all Christians and people of other faiths and convictions to commit themselves to the defence of human rights. Very concretely, CSC has produced a specific bookmark and a postcard which contain a prayer following the articles of the UDHR. The bookmark and postcard will be widely circulated within the CEC constituency and the European institutions.

Some copies of the bookmark and postcard have been sent to all CEC member churches and associated organisations. We hope that you will distribute them to your contacts. If you wish to order more copies or to learn more about the project, please contact Ms Elizabeta Kitanovic, eki@cec-kek.be. The documents are produced in English, German and French. We

obviously welcome initiatives to translate and print the document in other languages but kindly ask you to contact us first.

More information about our human rights work is available at:

http://www.cec-kek.org/content/human_rights.shtml

CSC becomes a member of the Fundamental Rights Platform of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency

CSC was among the around 100 members who took part in the first meeting of the Fundamental Rights Platform of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) in Vienna on 7-8 October 2008. Besides CSC, churches were represented by COMECE. In addition, there was one representative of the Muslim and of the Jewish communities each.

FRA was inaugurated on 1 March 2007 to continue the work of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) with a broader mandate. The fact that the Vienna meeting hardly had any representatives of ethnic minority raised the concern on the part of CSC whether the FRA would continue the commitment of the EUMC to issues of racism, xenophobia and intolerance. Overall, the participants were eager to see what 'added value' the Agency could bring to the work of those closely involved with human rights issues in Europe. The Agency was invited to be proactive, for instance, in relation to the situation of the Roma in Italy.

Further information about the event is available at:

http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CSCHR_FirstmeetingFRP.pdf

CSC comments for the FRA Annual Report 2008:

http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CSCHR_FRAAnnualReport08.pdf

EU Fundamental Rights Agency: <http://www.fra.europa.eu/fra/index.php>

New strategy for Building Europe for and with children

In 2006 the Council of Europe launched the programme "Building a Europe for and with children". The current campaign "Raise your hand against smacking" seeks to abolish all corporal punishment of children. A CSC representative participated in a conference organised under the auspices of the Swedish Presidency of the Council of Europe in Stockholm under the headline: "Building a Europe for and with children - towards a strategy for 2009-2011". The conference worked and discussed on the basis of a draft "Stockholm Strategy". The headlines of the strategic objectives are "Promotion of children's access to justice", "Eradication of all forms of violence against children", "Participation of children and their influence in society", "Special focus on particularly vulnerable children and integration of the gender dimension" and "Mainstreaming and coordination". That last theme is about introducing a child rights' perspective in all policies and activities of the Council of Europe and seeking support for this approach within the Member States.

CSC would like to work together with CEC members on the promotion of the rights of the child. If you are interested, please contact eki@cec-kek.be.

More information about the campaign and the event is available at:

http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/Building_a_Europe_for_and_with_children.pdf

The respective Council of Europe websites:

http://www.coe.int/t/transversalprojects/children/Default_en.asp

http://www.coe.int/t/transversalprojects/children/violence/corporalPunishment_en.asp

European Integration

The state of art of the Lisbon Treaty

Despite the 'no' vote in Ireland, the ratification process has continued. By now 23 EU Member States have completed the entire process and have submitted their instrument of ratification to the Italian Government. Sweden, which ratified the Treaty on 20 November has not yet done so, neither has Poland nor Germany. In the Czech Republic, the Constitutional Court gave the green light for the ratification on 26 November. It is now hoped that the Czech Parliament will ratify the Treaty in December but the country's President Václav Klaus announced he would not sign the Treaty before it is ratified by Ireland. The Czech Republic will hold the EU Presidency from 1 January till 30 June 2009. Churches in the Czech Republic have prepared themselves to make an active and positive contribution to the debates on the European Union during that period.

According to the latest surveys, the Irish population is slowly warming up to the Treaty. 43% say they would vote in favour of the Treaty and 39% against it if Ireland would keep its own Commissioner and there were guarantees of non-EU interference in Ireland's military neutrality, corporate taxation and its stand on abortion. The efforts of the Irish Government focus on keeping their own Commissioner. Curiously, the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon would make this easier. The current Treaty in force foresees the next Commission to have fewer members than there are EU Member States. The change in this matter would require a decision at an Inter-Governmental Conference. The Treaty of Lisbon, on the contrary, foresees the reduction in the number of Commissioners only in 2014 and the change of this by a unanimous decision of the European Council.

Ireland indicated that it would make a decision on a second referendum very close to the European Council of 11-12 December, which will debate the future of the Treaty.

Consolidated text of the Lisbon Treaty:

http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/full_text/index_en.htm

Climate Change

The EU debates the revision of the Emissions Trading Scheme

The revision of the existing EU Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is a key part of the 2008 EU climate change package (the package was opened for debate in January 2008, see Europe Update N° 14). Described as the 'jewel in the crown' of the EU's climate change programme,

ETS is expected to provide “a cost effective and economically efficient way of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by enabling reductions to be made, wherever they are cheapest”.

The target of a 20% reduction in emissions by 2020 is inadequate in the light of the 2007 Assessment Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The churches have pressed for at least “an overall greenhouse gas emission target of 30% below 1990 levels by 2020 to be achieved within the boundaries of the EU”. In addition, different churches have proposed that the EU should invest in additional emission reductions in developing countries to help them decarbonise their economies and adapt to climate change impacts.

On 7 October 2008, the Environment Committee of the European Parliament voted on ETS. Hundreds of amendments had been proposed and tabled in the weeks before. The final report of the committee was broadly in line with the proposals of the Commission. It was adopted by 44 votes in favour with 20 against and one abstention. It upheld the Commission’s target of a 20% reduction in emissions by 2020 and retained the trigger to a 30% reduction in the event of an international agreement. The Parliament went further than the Commission by proposing that at least 50 % (as opposed to the 20% proposed by the Commission) of ETS auction revenues should be paid into a dedicated international fund, which invests in projects in developing countries to help, for example, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or to reverse deforestation.

The EU climate change package is currently being debated in triologue between the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament. The French EU Presidency, representing the Council in the negotiations, wishes to reach an agreement prior to the Poznan UN Climate Change Conference to be held on 1-12 December 2008. Besides the official negotiations, the European Commission conducted a public Post-2012 consultation exercise, the results of which will be reported sometime in early 2009.

New! CEC webpage on Climate Change:

<http://www.cec-kek.org/content/climatechange.shtml>

European Commission website for the climate change package:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/climate_action.htm

Towards a global post-Kyoto Climate Change Agreement

Last year’s UN Climate Change Conference in Indonesia in December adopted the ‘Bali Road Map’ for future climate change negotiations and agreements (see Europe Update N° 13). The current EU negotiations are part of this overall process to reach a new international agreement on fighting climate change in Copenhagen in 2009. The new agreement would come into force in 2012 in succession to the first commitment period of the Kyoto protocol [2008-2012]. The road map ‘reflected a shared vision’ which included mitigation requirements on the side of the developed countries reinforced by agreed mid-term target, and mitigation and adaptation actions on the side of the developing countries supported and strengthened by finance and technology from the developed countries.

The EU is a leading participant in the UN negotiations. Although the Member States are independent members of the UN, the European Commission seeks to uphold a common position in negotiations. With regard to climate change the EU has aspired to exercise a

global and, as has been described by the President of the Commission, “an ambitious leadership” based on its own unilateral mitigation actions.

The website of the UN Climate Change Conference in Poznan 1-12 December 2008:
http://unfccc.int/meetings/cop_14/items/4481.php

Budget Reform

European Commission prepares for post-2013 Budget Reform

Budgetary Reform has long been one of the most contentious issues within the EU. In May 2006 it was agreed that the Commission should “undertake a full, wide-ranging review covering all aspects of EU spending, including the CAP” and report about the review in 2008-2009.

Some 300 organisations made submissions in a public consultation that was held over the winter 2007-2008, amongst them the Church of England. On 12 November 2008, the initial phase of the consultation process was completed with a conference “Reforming the budget, changing Europe”. The political response to the consultation will follow in 2009 when the Commission proposes its review.

The consultation demonstrated that two-thirds of contributors considered climate change to be ‘Europe’s big test for the future’, whilst half of the contributors recognised growth and energy security to be the EU’s main challenges. Concerns were also expressed about the inequalities between regions and countries, demographic changes, migration and security threats. Various approaches to the reform of CAP were discussed.

Radical Budget Reform which challenges national political interests is currently too politically sensitive for those seeking re-election in 2009. Already delayed, it is likely that the reform process will slow down even more in 2009 until the new Parliament and the new Commission are in place. Even if an EU-wide agreement could be achieved, any proposals for radical reforms to the budget are unlikely to be phased in before 2013.

The Church of England contribution to the consultation:
<http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CofEEUReviewBudget.pdf>

Religion in the Public Sphere

Religion in the public sphere - legal challenges and trends

On 18-20 November 2008, the Brussels Office of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) and CSC gathered church lawyers at a conference in Brussels entitled “Religion in the public sphere - legal challenges and trends”. Experts from 22 different countries discussed several issues affecting church-state relations. These included *inter alia* the challenges faced by minority churches in Europe, relations between churches and civil society, the practical impact of EU anti-discrimination legislation, the future implementation of Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty (providing for an open, transparent and regular dialogue between churches

and EU institutions), access of churches to EU funding, and the issue of religious freedom from Western and Eastern European perspectives.

The church lawyers reflected on the relationship between secular and religious legal orders, especially with regard to the latter's capacity to integrate religious aspects such as symbols of faith in the public sphere. The right of a religious community to independently determine their internal affairs (e.g. hierarchy or labour law regulations) was also discussed. Models of different church-state legalisation from across the EU were identified. Representatives from Central and Eastern Europe particularly raised the questions about legal status of minorities, restitution of church property confiscated during the Communist era and financial implications of legislative developments.

In addition to the expert exchange, on the evening of 18 November a public lecture on "Religion in the public sphere - the sociological aspects" was given by the Revd Canon Professor Robin Gill from the University of Kent (England) and Professor Dr. Dr.h.c. Miklos Tomka from the Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Hungary).

This first European-wide gathering for church lawyers proved useful, and an interest was expressed in continuing that type of exchange in the future. Regional co-operation between church lawyers has a long tradition, for instance, in the Nordic countries.

Material from the conference will be available on the CEC website.

Social Affairs

Sunday rest in EU Working Time Directive

The original Working Time Directive of 1993 made provision for a minimum weekly rest period, which "shall in principle include Sunday". In 1996 the European Court of Justice annulled this provision. The Court found "that the Council has failed to explain why Sunday, as a weekly rest day, is more closely connected with the health and safety of workers than any other day of the week." In the meantime, new research indicates that Sunday as a weekly rest day indeed contributes more than any other day of the week to the health and safety of workers. The churches are therefore pleading for a re-integration of Sunday as a weekly rest day in the revised Working Time Directive, which is at the moment discussed in the European Parliament. A decision shall be taken on 16 December 2008.

For further information see the Briefing Paper on Sunday Rest in EU Working Time Directive at: <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/economic.shtml>

Europe has failed to decrease poverty

The 7th Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion took place under the French EU Presidency in Marseille on 15-16 October 2008. The Round Table urged the political leaders to take tangible action to fight poverty and social exclusion. The European Union and its Member States have not made any progress in reducing poverty since the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000 and the current economic and financial crises makes this objective even harder to reach. Referring to the years of growth and the current crises, the Round

Table made a strong appeal that “poor people should not be made pay the bills of a party they were never invited to”. Today 16% of the European population lives below the poverty risk threshold. For the first time, the Round Table was followed up by a meeting of the ministers in charge of combating poverty and social exclusion. CSC was present at the Round Table.

Website of the Round Table:

http://www.ue2008.fr/PFUE/lang/en/accueil/PFUE-10_2008/PFUE-15.10.2008/7e_table_ronde_europeenne_sur_la_pauvrete_et_l_exclusion_sociale;jsessionid=C580781C6C1988BE4560B401E7DE99BC

Press Release of the informal meeting of the ministers in charge of combating poverty:

http://www.ue2008.fr/webdav/site/PFUE/shared/import/1016_Ministerielle_Pauvrete/C_ommuniqu_e_final_ministerielle_pauvrete_EN.pdf

Intercultural Dialogue

On 11 November 2008, in the framework of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, the European Commission organised a conference entitled “Intercultural dialogue: a challenge for faith and convictions”. The conference first explored how religion and faith relate to media and education. It called, for instance, on a responsible journalism which, instead of creating stereotypes and divides, serves as a forum for intercultural dialogue. With regard to education, the good ways to teach about religions and beliefs were explored. The last session learned about existing initiatives to conduct inter and intra-faith dialogue. Besides their own work, CSC and COMECE speakers also introduced the co-operation between the Catholic Church and the CEC constituency. The participants learned about the existence of the Charta Oecumenica which was signed by CEC and CCEE in 2001 to provide Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe, and which also speaks about dialogue with Muslims and Jews. The work of the joint CEC-CCEE Committee for Relations with Muslims in Europe (CRME) was presented, as well as the four Islam, Christianity and Europe seminars, which CSC and COMECE co-organised this year together with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (see previous Europe Updates).

For more information on the religious dimension of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, please read the CSC Briefing attached to this Europe Update.

The website of the 11 November Conference: <http://www.interreligious.teamwork.fr/>

Charta Oecumenica: <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/charta.shtml>

Migration

CCME and CEC will integrate

Meeting parallel in Cyprus in October, the Assembly of the Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and the Central Committee of the Conference of European Churches approved the integration between the two organisations. The CCME Assembly

stated that the integration “shall strengthen the churches’ commitment to strangers, responding to the message of the Bible, which insists on the dignity of every human being, in order to promote an inclusive policy at European level and national levels for migrants, refugees and minority groups.”

After the integration, CCME (based in Brussels) becomes the third Commission of CEC together with the Church and Society Commission (based in Brussels and Strasbourg) and the Churches in Dialogue Commission (based in Geneva). The General Secretariat of CEC is in Geneva.

CCME calls for a renewed commitment to combat trafficking

The CCME Assembly in Cyprus on 8-11 October was opened by a conference “Churches addressing trafficking in human beings”. The ensuing Assembly adopted the future orientation of CCME in this area.

CCME position paper on trafficking in human beings:

<http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/CCME-trafficking-positionFINALadopted.pdf>

CCME Press Release on the conference of 9 October 2008:

<http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CCMEPRProtarasconfcq0852e.pdf>

Churches comment EU proposals on labour migration

CCME, together with its Christian partner organisations has issued a statement, which responds to several European Commission proposals concerning labour migration. Churches support the efforts of the EU towards a joint policy to manage migration and to create a common and transparent framework concerning access to the labour markets in the EU Member States. However, the churches call for political courage to change the migration debate into a positive one and to better acknowledge the benefits of legal migration channels for the migrants, for their countries of origin and for the EU itself.

Read the churches’ statement at:

<http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/Christian%20comments%20on%20EU%20labour%20migration.pdf>

Forthcoming events

CSC consultations

On 15 December 2008, CSC together with COMECE and the European Commission will organise a Dialogue Seminar in Brussels on “Good Education in Intercultural Environment”. The seminar will bring together experts in education and migration issues from churches, EU institutions and academic world. The discussion will focus on the examination of the “Green Paper on migration and mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems”, a

commission document issued on 3 July 2008 and currently under public consultation. For further enquiries, please contact elo@cec-kek.be.

Green Paper on migration and mobility, COM (2008) 423
http://ec.europa.eu/education/school21/com423_en.pdf



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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>