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CSC Update on European Affairs

TOPICS COVERED:

Churches and the Swedish EU Presidency; CEC Lyon Assembly and future work of CSC; Treaty of Lisbon; new European Parliament; future European Commission; European integration; EU enlargement; learning mobility; human rights; financial and economic crises; poverty; climate change; refugee resettlement; migration; upcoming events.

Swedish EU Presidency

European Churches meet the Swedish EU Presidency

Following the now well-established tradition of dialogue between the churches and the rotating EU Council Presidencies, representatives of the churches in Sweden and in Europe met on 30 September 2009 with the Swedish EU-Presidency in Stockholm. The church delegation was received by Minister for European Union Affairs, Ms Cecilia Malmström.

The representatives of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC/CEC), the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences in the European Communities (COMECE) and Swedish churches expressed their deep concern to the Presidency with regard to the impact of climate change on the future of mankind and creation. Taking particularly into consideration the burden that climate change represents for developing countries and for future generations, they encouraged the EU to do its utmost in order to achieve an ambitious worldwide agreement in Copenhagen in December.

In the view of current plans to separate justice and human rights but retain migration and security in the remit of one EU Commissioner, church representatives emphasised the need to make a distinction between the question of migration and that of security issues. Migrants should have their dignity respected and not be considered as a threat to the security of the EU. In view of the forthcoming High Level Ministerial Conference "Towards Global EU Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings" the churches urged the EU to intensify its fight against any form of human trafficking and its efforts to protect victims of trafficking.

In relation to the forthcoming Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference 3-28 May 2010, the delegation urged the Presidency to achieve a common and positive European response to the "option zero" proposed by US President Obama (see Europe Update N° 25).

Referring to the draft anti-discrimination directive currently being discussed by the EU Council, the churches re-asserted their firm commitment against any form of discrimination. However, they deplored the lack of legal clarity with regard to the scope of the directive in the areas which remain outside of EU competence, such as education. The churches emphasised that any legislation ensuring equal treatment should guarantee respect for other rights and freedoms such as the freedom of religion or belief and of expression. Therefore, all the consequences of the proposal should be duly taken into account before it is adopted.

Finally, the Swedish EU Presidency and the church representatives agreed that Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty on dialogue between churches and EU institutions should enable to strengthening and inspiring dialogue both on European as well as on national level.

The Swedish churches were represented by Rev. Karin Wiborn (Baptist Union of Sweden), Chair of the Christian Council of Sweden, Mgr. Anders Arborelius (Roman Catholic Bishop of Stockholm), Member of the Presidium of the Christian Council of Sweden, Rev. Sven-Bernhard Fast, General Secretary of the Christian Council of Sweden, Mr George Joseph, International Secretary of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Stockholm, Mr Lennart Molin, Associate General Secretary of the Christian Council of Sweden and Director of Ecumenical Diaconia/Church-Society, and Mr Ragnar Svenserud, Europe Secretary of the Church of Sweden and Chair of the Christian Council of Sweden's Working Group on the EU Presidency. CSC was represented by its Director and Associate General Secretary of CEC Rev. Rüdiger Noll and COMECE by its General Secretary Fr. Piotr Mazurkiewicz.

... and continue advocating on other fronts

Besides the above-mentioned high-level meeting, the churches in Sweden continue to promote their four key topics on other fronts. Climate change was the focus of both an event in Åre during the informal Environmental Council meeting on 24-25 July and of a seminar in Stockholm on 16 September. Resettlement was strongly and successfully promoted in a conference in Stockholm-Sigtuna in late August (see the article below). Churches views on arms trade were presented in a September seminar and shared with the Swedish media through a debate article. Its English translation will be circulated to decision-makers in view of the new EU-US statement on non-proliferation and disarmament expected in November. Enlargement will be debated in a Brussels conference with Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn on 26-27 October (see the announcement below). Churches will also hold their own related event on 14 October to prepare their attendance at the 8th Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion to be held in Stockholm on 15-16 October. The churches publication "Take part in Europe" has been positively received, notably by European Commission President José Manuel Barroso and two of its Vice-Presidents, Margot Wallström and Jacques Barrot, and the EU Commissioner for Education and Culture Jan Figel.

CEC Lyon Assembly

Lyon sets guidelines until the extraordinary assembly in 2013

The 13th CEC Assembly in Lyon on 15-21 July elected a new Central Committee and endowed a group of wise men and women with the task to elaborate a proposal for a new legal basis, vision, goals and structural framework for CEC by the end of 2011. The decisions on CEC's future outlook and constitution will be taken at an extraordinary constitutional and general assembly in the summer 2013.

In the meanwhile, the Assembly Policy Reference Report paves the way for the work to be carried out in this four-year period. It makes recommendations on how to build up trust and commitment of member churches towards CEC, to strengthen dialogue and relations between the churches, to work on coherence and visibility of the organisation and to convey the common voice of Christian Churches into decision-making processes in Europe.

In addition, the Assembly adopted its message to all the member churches and issued six public statements. These respectively called for a world free of nuclear weapons, for the churches to show solidarity to the Roma minority in Europe, for a better stewardship of creation, for a strengthening of human rights, for the recognition of the value of migrant people, and for the promotion of ethical principles in financial and economic structures.

Along these guidelines, CSC is now drafting a more detailed plan for its future work and working methods. It will be discussed at the next Europe Secretaries meeting in Mechelen (near Brussels) on 17-19 November and adopted by the CSC Annual Plenary.

The assembly documents are available at:

<http://assembly.ceceurope.org/index.php?id=612>

Lisbon Treaty

Irish vote 'yes' but the Treaty mission is not yet accomplished

With 67.1% of the Irish voting in favour and 32.9 % against, the second referendum in Ireland takes the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty one decisive step forward. The vote is considered a success as it gathered a bigger crowd behind it (58% of the electorate) than the first try (53%) in June 2008. It is, however, considered a failure for the attempts to make the EU gain relevance beyond pure economics. According to the first analyses, Ireland voted 'yes' because they deemed that a 'no' vote might have had negative economic consequences. As the CSC Report on the Treaty of Lisbon (from March 2008) reads, CSC believes there are other and better reasons to support the new Treaty.

The President of Germany, Horst Köhler signed the Treaty of Lisbon on 23 September, therefore completing its German ratification process. Signing the Treaty became possible after both chambers of the German parliament had approved the legislative changes demanded by the country's constitutional court.

The Irish and German approvals leave Poland and the Czech Republic as the only countries not having ratified the Treaty. The Polish President Lech Kaczynski who wanted to wait until the results of the Irish referendum were known, is expected to sign the Treaty without delay. In the Czech Republic the situation is unsure. The Treaty is again being challenged in the Constitutional Court about its compliance with the Czech Constitution. The case was tabled by a group of senators mainly from the Civic Democratic Party (ODS). The board of the same party urged, in the aftermath of the Irish vote, the Czech President Vaclav Klaus to follow the Parliament's approval and sign the Treaty. As the board of ODS sees the country's relations with the United States weakened by the US's decision not to station a missile defence radar base on Czech soil, they wish to avoid also damaging the country's relations with EU partners. The Czech case risks to – and is meant to – further complicate the process. Because, if the legal process gets delayed and the conservatives come to power in the United Kingdom, as is likely to happen, the Treaty will also be put to the vote in Britain.

Read the commentary of the European Policy Centre on the issue. CSC is a member of this Brussels-based think-tank.

http://www.epc.eu/TEWN/pdf/41255650_Lisbon%20mission%20accomplished.pdf

CSC Report on the Treaty of Lisbon:

<http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/EuropeUpdate23TreatyofLisbon.pdf>

European Parliament

Ready to work

The new European Parliament has set its wheels in motion. At its first plenary in mid-July it elected a Protestant Polish member, Jerzy Buzek (EPP), as its President for the first two-and-a-half-year term. In his inaugural address Mr Buzek named the economic crisis and European solidarity, energy and the environment, foreign policy, human rights and “our system of values”, and the reform of the European Parliament as the five main challenges.

Read more about the new President and his views at:

<http://www.ep-president.eu/view/en/index.html>

Take a look at the updated European Parliament website at:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/>

European Commission

Old leader. New visions?

With 382 votes in favour and 219 votes against, José Manuel Barroso got elected by the European Parliament for his second five-year term. Upon the request of his opposition – and for the sake of openness – Barroso put forward his political guidelines and debated them with the parliamentarians prior to the election. The ambitions of Barroso for the coming term can be summarised as follows: succeeding in overcoming the economic and financial crises, fighting climate change, boosting the new sources of growth and social cohesion, advancing

peoples' Europe and enhancing the EU's role as a global actor. In front of the press, Barroso defended the vagueness of his programme by explaining that the entire new college had to be heard before the Commission could draw up a more concrete work programme.

Political guidelines for the next Commission:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/pdf/press_20090903_EN.pdf

European Integration

CSC invites for a debate on European Integration

The churches have been supporting and involved in the European integration process since its inception with the conviction that it should not limit itself to the economic sphere. The commitment of the churches is an expression of their comprehensive understanding of the mission and witness of the church: The call to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to people is also a call to developing a just, free and democratic society where people live in dignity. This is one of key messages of the new CSC booklet "European integration - a way forward?"

Its subtitle "Churches in Europe contributing to Europe's future: framework and issues" offers, in addition to the historical overview of the integration process, a theologically-based ethical and anthropological perspective. This perspective shapes the churches' contribution to European integration and the framework for their dialogue with the European institutions. Moreover, the document contains analyses of and proposals for the future of the integration process. With this document CSC encourages churches in Europe to pursue the debate on European integration along questions such as:

- What elements can unify Europe vis-à-vis existing diversity?
- What role does culture play in the integration process?
- Can churches present a unifying view on values in Europe?
- What forms should solidarity take at European and national level?

We would appreciate an indication of any activity and reflection you undertook on this topic. The booklet is available on the CEC website: <http://www.cec-kek.org/>. For feedback or questions or to order hard copies, please contact Rev. Dr. Peter Pavlovic (ppt@cec-kek.be).

EU Enlargement

The CSC Briefing on EU Enlargement, issued in July, gives a detailed account of what is at stake in the EU enlargement process and debate (see the link below). Since then progress has been made in solving the border dispute between Croatia and Slovenia, which had been blocking Croatia's membership negotiations since December 2008. Thanks to a bilateral agreement to submit their dispute to international arbitration, Slovenia allowed on 2 October opening the negotiations on six chapters (free circulation of capital, agriculture, food security, taxation, regional policy, and justice, freedom and security) and closing them on five chapters (free circulation of workers, company law, statistics, trans-European networks and customs union). By now 28 of the 35 chapters have been opened and 12 provisionally closed. In case Croatia continues to make steady progress, including in its co-operation with

the International Criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the negotiations might be concluded by mid-2010, Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn estimates.

With regard to Turkey, the latest input to the related debate is the publication by the Independent Commission on Turkey of "Turkey in Europe: Breaking the Vicious Circle". The commission, composed of high-level personalities in favour of Turkish accession, argues that "it is a matter of the EU's credibility, self-interest and fairness to preserve Turkish European perspective". In return, the group urges Turkey to confirm - through a dynamic reform process - its willingness and determination to join the EU.

http://www.independentcommissiononturkey.org/pdfs/2009_english.pdf

As was foreseen, in mid-July the European Commission tabled a proposal for a visa-free travel with the new biometric passports for Serbia, FYROM and Montenegro to take effect at the beginning of 2010. It has now announced that it is contemplating similar measures for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina once those countries meet the necessary standards. At this stage Macedonia fulfils all the required conditions, and Serbia and Montenegro are close to meeting them. The requirements include guaranteeing sufficient passport security and border controls as well as reinforcing the fight against corruption and organised crime.

Iceland applied for EU membership on 16 July. The Icelandic Government endeavours to proceed swiftly with the negotiations and hopes to join the European Union by 2012. The EU membership requires the approval of the Icelandic population.

CSC Briefing on EU Enlargement (July):

<http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/EuropeUpdate26Briefing.pdf>

Education

Join the EU consultation on the learning mobility of young people

The European Commission has opened a consultation on the Green Paper on promoting the learning mobility of young people. CSC intends to issue a statement with CEC associated youth organisations, Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and the Churches in Dialogue Commission of CEC as well as Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienst. A draft proposal will be sent out to member churches for internal consultation by 15 October. "Learning mobility... can help combat the risks of isolation, protectionism and xenophobia in times of economic crisis. It can help foster a deepened sense of European identity and citizenship among young people" states the Green Paper.

Churches have a lot to contribute in enhancing the learning mobility of young people. They provide both formal and informal education and offer platforms for intercultural exchanges. Examples of the latter are the stewards' programmes of ecumenical assemblies. The task of this autumn's reflection is to see how these experiences of young people can be taken into account in the formalised frame of European exchange programmes. What standards have to be fulfilled to ensure that voluntary work and experiences within churches count as mobility experience? Another point to be raised is that - despite many sources of funding - it is mostly young people with a wealthy background who get the possibility of learning mobility. Young people who, for various reasons, have not had the opportunity to take part

in exchange programmes should not be confronted with unreasonable disadvantages when entering professional life.

CSC/CEC invites member churches to study the Green Paper, reflect on the best practices they have and, as soon as the draft proposal is ready and circulated, share their views and experiences.

The Green Paper on Learning Mobility for Young People is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/mobility/com329_en.pdf

Human Rights

CSC takes part in OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting and calls for realisation of freedom of religion for all

CSC took part in the annual OSCE/ODIHR (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw on 29 September. In a session on fundamental freedoms it called upon the OSCE Participating States to support the co-operation of the ODIHR with civil society and with other intergovernmental organisations, such as the newly established EU Fundamental Rights Agency. CSC urged the States to implement the OSCE commitments to protect freedoms for all religions, for all individuals and for religious communities, majority and minority communities alike. It asked them to fully implement the commitments ensuring the protection of places of worship, holy sites and religious monuments. It highlighted the situation in Northern Cyprus as well as in Kosovo as special concerns. Furthermore, CSC demanded more resources to the ODIHR in order to enable it to offer more training programmes in the area of freedom of religion or belief.

Read more about the event at: <http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CSCHumanRights.pdf>.

CSC and the EU Human Rights Agency

CSC has taken an active role in the work of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency. It is a member in its Fundamental Rights Platform and its nine-member Advisory Panel. The first meeting of the Advisory Panel took place on 7 September in Vienna. It discussed the Terms of Reference of the Advisory Panel, the nine areas of work set out in the Agency's Multi-annual Framework, funding regulations and the membership criteria for the Fundamental Rights Platform. The role of the Advisory Panel is to channel communication between the EU FRA's Director, FRA's Management Board and EU Fundamental Rights Platform.

For the third consecutive year, CSC provided, upon request, comments to the Agency's Annual Report and made proposals for its future work. Read the CSC response at: http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CSCResposneEU_FRA_AnnualReport2009.pdf.

Social Affairs

Financial and Economic Crisis - Responses to the Open Letter from the European Commission

On 28-30 April 2009 representatives of European churches met in Brussels and Mechelen for a conference on "Shaping European economic and social policies in times of uncertainty". As a result of their discussions, CSC sent an open letter to the Presidents of the European Institutions, expressing the concern that the current crisis is much deeper than what emerges from the analysis of the EU institutions (see <http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/Openletter5May2009.pdf>). This letter has now received a common response from the Cabinet of Commission President Barroso and from Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunity. Their response stresses the need for a coordinated EU response. It is published on the CEC website on <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/economic.shtml>.

2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion

The national programmes of EU Member States for the 2010 Year are now available on www.2010againstpoverity.eu. Norway and Iceland will also participate in the Year, but have not yet presented their national programmes. The national 2010 Year activities are coordinated by National Implementing Bodies (NIB). In a number of EU Member States NIBs include non-governmental organisations and churches. Funding opportunities for the 2010 Year are only available on national level and will be published in the near future.

Poverty hurts soul

CSC is preparing its campaign for the Year 2010 with a focus on a holistic understanding of poverty. The project proposal will be sent to CEC Member Churches and Associated Organisations in the coming weeks. Those interested in participating in the project are kindly asked to contact Rev. Dr. Dieter Heidtmann (dht@cec-kek.be). We also welcome information on your planned activities in order to incorporate them into our overall plan for 2010.

Climate Change

The Church of England launches a Climate Justice Fund

The Climate Justice Fund set up by the Church of England and the Teafund serves as a good example of a creative response to climate change. The Climate Justice Fund is a web-based tool that enables individuals and parishes in the UK to calculate their carbon footprint and to pay compensation for anything over their fair share. The money accrued will, in the first instance, be used to finance adaptation projects in Uganda, Tanzania and Congo. The website also offers practical guidance on how individuals and parishes can advocate for climate justice and invites to pray for the African churches supported by the fund.

For more information visit <http://www.climatejusticefund.org/>

Migration

Swedish EU Presidency: churches' conference discusses details of "the road ahead" for EU resettlement scheme

Churches' conference in Stockholm-Sigtuna in late August gathered some 90 participants from 15 EU Member States to discuss the process "towards the common EU resettlement scheme". The conference, which was jointly organised by CCME, the Church of Sweden, the Swedish Christian Council and the Sigtuna Foundation, took place during the first weeks of the Swedish EU Council Presidency and a week prior to the adoption of a proposal for an EU resettlement scheme by the European Commission.

In his opening statement, the Swedish Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Tobias Billström, set out the ambition of his government to prioritise resettlement during its EU Presidency and to increase commitment of EU Member States to resettling refugees. He also called for a clear distinction between resettlement to the EU of refugees from third countries and recent ideas concerning a "relocation" mechanism, by which refugees and asylum seekers would be transferred within EU member states.

The UN's Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees, Erika Feller underlined the importance of refugee resettlement. "Resettlement matters for the refugees, for the community, for the host countries, but also receiving countries", she said. Against this background, the international community is placing high hopes in increased EU efforts to protect refugees through refugee resettlement.

The Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security, Jacques Barrot stressed: "European citizens (need to) feel able to support these programmes of resettlement. And of course the churches have an essential role to play". "They can educate people's minds and activate their hearts", he added.

Background Note

Refugee resettlement is the process by which refugees who have to flee their home country and find initial, but insufficient or temporary protection in another country, are resettled into a third country and find permanent protection and a durable, sustainable solution there. While around one hundred thousand refugees are annually resettled to the US, Canada and Australia, resettlement is since the 1960ies scarcely used in Europe: currently only ten EU member states regularly carry out resettlement, resettling around 4.000 refugees annually. CCME is since 2004 promoting resettlement as an additional tool for refugee protection in Europe.

The full text of the speech of Minister Billström can be found at:
<http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/11553/a/130510>

The English transcript of the message of Commissioner Barrot can be found at:
<http://www.skr.org/download/18.7cf9c5aa121e17bab42800047118/Microsoft+Word+-+Barrot.pdf>

CCME published “12 Arguments and 7 Proposals for the EU Resettlement Scheme” on 29 June 2009. These are available at:
<http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/090629%20RR%20CCME%20considerations%20and%20recommendations%20EU%20RR%20scheme%20FINAL.pdf>

More material on the conference is available at:
<http://www.skr.org/press/pressmaterialvidarebosattningskonferens.4.7cf9c5aa121e17bab42800041531.html>

CCME welcomes EU plans to protect more refugees, but is concerned about progress rate

CCME welcomed the proposal for an EU resettlement scheme, adopted by the European Commission on 2 September, but considers that more ambition is needed if the EU wants it to have real impact. Doris Peschke, General Secretary of CCME expressed CCME’s support for the tabled proposal to agree on a number of third countries from where refugees would be resettled in a joint effort by EU Member States. According to her, EU efforts would achieve better results in globally resolving the most dramatic refugee situations if Member States could agree on common priority areas and priority groups for resettlement. However, the impact can only be significant if Member States provide more places for resettlement.

CCME also doubts whether a resettlement programme would in the immediate future lead to a reduction of the number of persons trying to cross the EU’s external borders. “We welcome any measure which helps refugees to find protection in Europe without risking their lives at the EU’s external border,” Doris Peschke says. A significant reduction of the number of people trying to cross EU borders would however require a more comprehensive and broader review of EU asylum and migration policies.

CCME hopes that the EU efforts in the field of refugee resettlement will in the future be better coordinated with EU activities in the area of external relations. CCME has offered its expertise to the proposed EU expert group on resettlement.

For the Commission proposal see:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/file.jsp?id=9794483>

Christian organisations want the Stockholm Programme to guarantee the respect of human rights of migrants and refugees

CCME, together with the five other organisations of the “Christian Group”, published a set of recommendations about the so-called “Stockholm programme” on freedom, security and justice for the period 2010-2014. In the recommendations, the six organisations express “the conviction that the core values of the European Union as an area of freedom and justice must be reflected by day-to-day politics”. They call for a human rights centred migration policy,

access to protection for those in need of it as well as analysing the need “to familiarize European citizens with an increasingly diverse ethnic, religious and cultural society.”

The text is available at: http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/Christian_Group_-_Recomm_for_Stockholm_Program_final.pdf

The Year of European Churches responding to migration 2010 to be launched in Budapest on 25-27 November

CCME is pleased to announce the opening hearing of the “migration 2010 – year of European Churches responding to migration 2010.” The event, which is hosted by the Hungarian Reformed Church and organised by CCME, is held in cooperation with the World Council of Churches’ Global Ecumenical Network on Migration (GEM), which meets prior to the conference. The hearing has four main objectives:

- to reflect the biblical and theological foundations of Churches’ engagement with the issue of migration;
- to present the different areas in which churches in Europe are engaged with the issue of migration, in particular focussing on the aspects of unity, witness and advocacy;
- to share which activities are planned for the migration year 2010;
- to reflect on possible common actions of churches in Europe in the coming years, particularly in the area of advocacy.

More information at info@ccme.be.

Upcoming events

Invitation to a Brussels conference on EU-Turkey relations

As part of their contribution to the Swedish EU Presidency, the churches in Sweden are, in partnership with CSC, organizing a conference on the role of faith communities and civil society in bridging the divide between the European Union and Turkey. The voice of the EU will be represented by its Commissioner for Enlargement, Olli Rehn. The event will take place in Brussels on 26-27 October. For more information or in order to register, please contact the main organizer: the Ecumenical Office for EU Relations (margareta.wallin@kyrkornaseukontor.org, +46 8 453 68 58).

More information is available at:

<http://www.skr.org/download/18.1fe8f33123572b59ab80005956/Turkiet+-+inbjudan.pdf>



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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.

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