



Conference of European Churches
Conférence des Églises Européennes
Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen

N ° 28

7/ 2009

CSC Update on European Affairs

TOPICS COVERED:

CSC Europe Secretaries meeting; Treaty of Lisbon and new top jobs; arms trade; nuclear weapons; Swiss CoE Presidency; trafficking of human beings; anti-discrimination; Swiss initiative on minarets; crucifix in Italian schools; upcoming events.

CSC Europe Secretaries Meeting

CSC commemorates 50 years of existence

This year's Europe Secretaries meeting took place around November 19 to mark the 50th anniversary of (what is now) the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC of CEC). It was honoured by the active presence of Helmut von Verschuer, a former European Commission official and one of the founders of the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS). Together with Jaap Houtman, another former EC official and long-standing friend of EECCS/CSC, they reminded the church representatives that it were the Christian civil servants who initiated the dialogue between the churches and the EU institutions. According to Helmut von Verschuer, the constant search for justice and peace make up the core of this dialogue, and in cases where the states do not follow this vocation, the churches ought to be a most credible authority to intervene. The celebration began with a fascinating presentation on Europe as our autobiography by Mr Alastair Hulbert, former EECCS/CSC staff. The story which drew on European arts, geography, history and mythology was an invitation to love and cherish our common Europe.

Rev. Marc Lenders, who served the Ecumenical Association for over 30 years, pointed at a parallelism in developments within the EU and the ecumenical movement; the growing nationalism in EU decision-making, and the rise of an ecumenism of profiles within the CEC family. Marc Lenders argued that having contributed to divisions in Europe and having at times nourished nationalism, the churches have a debt to pay and they can do so by countering divides in Europe. The churches' work should witness a commitment for justice, peace and integrity of creation. In addition, Marc Lenders invited the churches to undertake a renewed reflection on the finalities of EU integration. The celebration was also an

opportunity to hear personal witnesses and testimonies from several other people who have marked the history of the organisation: Antje Heider-Rottwilm, Laurens Hogebrink, Win Burton and Antoinette Panhuis.

Besides the celebration and historical and future perspectives, the Europe Secretaries meeting discussed the current issues on CSC's and Europe's agendas: the Lisbon Treaty and the implementation of the article 17 on open, transparent and regular dialogue; human rights; nuclear disarmament; education; globalisation; European Year on Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, and European Churches responding to Migration 2010. The worship at van Maerlant Chapel reflected on the overcoming of barriers, including the fall of the Berlin Wall 20 years ago.

European Churches meet the European Parliament

On 18 November, the Vice-President of the European Parliament Pál Schmitt (EPP-HU) received the Europe Secretaries at his premises. This was the first meeting he held in his function as a focal point for the Parliament's dialogue with churches and religious communities. Pál Schmitt confirmed the Parliament's willingness to have a structured dialogue with churches and religious communities on issues such as the economic crises, sustainable development, education, migration and human rights, and even hinted at a possibility to have community funding for such dialogue. Bernd Lange MEP (S&D-DE) suggested poverty as an issue for a project-oriented dialogue and wished the churches to contribute to giving a soul for Europe. (Bishop) László Tóké MEP (EPP-RO) praised ecumenism for the role it has to-date played in inspiring European thinking. He also told about the Christian ecumenical inter-group he hopes to establish in the new European Parliament. Sari Essayah MEP (EPP-FIN) saw (the understanding of) Christianity as a key to understanding European life and warmed up minds of the Church and Society Secretaries by recognizing the role of churches as an integral part of society.

Lisbon Treaty

Ratified - finally.

With the signature of Vaclav Klaus, the Treaty of Lisbon was finally confirmed as a new legal basis for the European Union. Its entering into force on 1 December 2009 concluded a eight-year long process which dissatisfied both those who wished this journey to bring Europe closer to the citizens and those wanting to prevent or limit integration. However, as a compromise it hopefully - as CSC strongly believes - will strengthen human rights and the social dimension of the European Union and foster participatory democracy. For the churches, this culminates in the legal basis for an open, transparent and regular dialogue. Since early autumn, CSC has been working together with the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) in order to prepare a proposal as to how this dialogue ought to be realised in practise. The results of these reflections were shared with the CSC Europe Secretaries meeting and with CSC Executive Committee in November. A revised draft, which also draws on the discussions at the Assembly of COMECE will, as a next step, be shared with the Central Committee of the Conference of European Churches when it meets on in Geneva 16-19 December.

In addition, the churches welcome the recognition that church-state relations will also in the future be decided at the national level. Furthermore, the Lisbon Treaty will make decision-making easier by decreasing the number of issues which require unanimity. It will make this process more transparent and more democratic by enshrining the new rights of the European Parliament as a quasi equal legislator with the Council (Governments of the Member States). It will create the EU Foreign Service and thereby also, hopefully, improves the coherence of the EU's external policies not least between trade and development, trade and human rights or security and migration. You will find the revised CSC Report on the Treaty of Lisbon attached to this Europe Update.

Presidency report of the External Action Service (23 October)

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st14/st14930.en09.pdf>

Summary of the debates on the External Action Service (27 October)

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st15/st15133.en09.pdf>

(More recent documents on EEAS have not been made public.)

Comprehensive description of EU Treaties in Greek

Since a year readers knowledgeable in Greek have had the opportunity, for the first time, to read a comprehensive description of the founding treaties of the European Union in that language. The book entitled (translation) "The Treaties of the European Union" was produced by Dr. Panos Panayiotopoulos (Publications Sakkoula, Athens 2008). The book launch took place in Brussels in October and gathered, besides the author, several Greek Members of the European Parliament and other representatives of EU institutions including the Permanent Representative of Greece to the EU, Ambassador Sotiropoulos.

Top Jobs

Van Rompuy and Ashton take the limelight

The extraordinary European Council of 19 November appointed the Belgian Prime Minister Herman Van Rompuy as the first President of the European Council and the British EU trade Commissioner Catherine Ashton as the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Van Rompuy will serve a mandate of two-and-half years, renewable once and Ashton a mandate of five years. Van Rompuy will begin his term of office on 1 January 2010. Ashton has already begun her work as High Representative but the confirmation of her post still requires the consent of the European Parliament. Ashton was unable to convince the Parliament during her first hearing and was invited to return to the Parliament in January.

Visit the website of High Representative Ashton at:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/ashton/index_en.htm

New Commission begins to take shape

In late November, the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, unveiled his proposal for a new team. The new college of Commissioners, as a whole, must still be approved by the European Parliament. Commissioners-designate will appear in individual hearings before the Parliamentary committees between 11 and 19 January. The vote of consent is now scheduled for 26 January. The Commission will serve a term of five years.

Responsibilities of the Commissioners-designate:

Joaquín ALMUNIA (ES): Competition. Vice-President of the Commission.

László ANDOR (HU): Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

Baroness Catherine ASHTON (UK): High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security and Vice-President of the Commission.

Michel BARNIER (FR): Internal Market and Services.

Dacian CIOLOS (RO): Agriculture and Rural Development.

John DALLI (MT): Health and Consumer Policy.

Maria DAMANAKI (GR): Maritime Affairs and Fisheries.

Karel DE GUCHT (BE): Trade.

Štefan FÜLE (CZ): Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy. *

Maire GEOGHEGAN-QUINN (IE): Research, Innovation and Science.

Johannes HAHN (AT): Regional Policy.

Connie HEDEGAARD (DK): Climate Action.

Rumiana JELEVA (BG): International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response. *

Siim KALLAS (EE): Transport. Vice-President of the Commission.

Neelie KROES (NL): Digital Agenda. Vice-President of the Commission.

Janusz LEWANDOWSKI (PL): Budget and Financial Programming.

Cecilia MALMSTRÖM (SE): Home Affairs.

Günter ÖTTINGER (DE): Energy.

Andris PIEBALGS (LV): Development.*

Janez POTOČNIK (SI): Environment.

Viviane REDING (LU): Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship. Vice-President of the Commission.

Olli REHN (FI): Economic and Monetary Affairs.

Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ (SK): Inter-Institutional Relations and Administration. Vice-President of the Commission. .

Algirdas ŠEMETA (LT): Taxation and Customs Union, Audit and Anti-Fraud.

Antonio TAJANI (IT): Industry and Entrepreneurship. Vice-President of the Commission.

Androulla VASSILIOU (CY): Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth.

European Commission Press Release:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1837&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Swedish churches call for clearer rules to govern arms trade

Arms trade, one of the four key topics highlighted by the Churches in Sweden during the Swedish EU Presidency has been a concern to the Swedish Churches since years. On 27 September, on the eve of the informal meeting of EU defence ministers in Gothenburg, the Churches issued a debate article in the Swedish newspaper Göteborgs-Posten entitled "Clearer rules needed for EU arms trade". Prior the EU-US Summit on 2-3 November, which discussed the issue of arms trade, the Swedish churches addressed the European level. In their letter, also related to the on-going negotiations on the International Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) within the UN framework, the Swedish Churches draw the EU Member States' attention to the need for clearer rules to govern arms trade. Whereas the Common Position adopted in December 2008 made the EU rules on arms trade legally-binding, and thus provided a welcomed step forward, it has not had a significant impact on the way EU countries, including Sweden, trade arms.

The Churches called upon the EU Member States, especially the Swedish EU Presidency, to act within the EU and UN frameworks and together with the United States in order to achieve guidelines which forbid all trade of conventional arms and ammunitions in cases where there is a risk that they could be used to perpetrate serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law or that they could undermine sustainable development.

The Churches' statement, which was widely distributed among the Brussels decision-makers and relevant EU officials, received a response from the Swedish Ambassador to the Political and Security Committee. In his response, Ambassador Skoog affirmed that the Swedish Government wants "an effective global Arms Trade Treaty, binding under international law and designed to enable a responsible control of arms trade". During its Presidency, Sweden, Ambassador Skoog wrote, has promoted the issue in its contacts with the United States as well as in regional meetings held in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. In relation to the EU Common Position, the Ambassador mentioned "the continuous dialogue between the Member States" on its implementation and the efforts "to advance the coherence of the Member States actions".

Churches urge Europe to back Obama's nuclear policy

On 10 December, US President Barack Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to reassert the role of international diplomacy and for providing the world with a momentum to end reliance on nuclear deterrence. CSC, through a press release, seized this occasion to express the churches' support for Obama's new 'zero' policy and urged Europe to rally to it. CSC stressed that next year would provide Europe with two important and rare occasions to show its commitment to nuclear disarmament. In May, the world will gather in New York to take stock of the progress made in the realization of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968. Later in the year NATO will adopt a new Strategic Concept, which will include decisions about the role of tactical nuclear weapons in NATO. Currently, some 240 US nuclear bombs are deployed in five European NATO member states.

In a letter dated 26 November, CSC and COMECE together with the Christian Council of Sweden urged the European Union for a clear endorsement of the goal of a world free of

nuclear weapons. The churches invited the Swedish and Spanish EU Presidencies and the Council Secretariat to ensure transparency in the preparation of the EU Common Position for the NPT Review Conference and requested that churches and the organized civil society be involved in this process.

In late October, the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches, the Councils of Churches in the USA and Canada addressed the leadership of NATO and the European Union as well as Presidents Obama and Medvedev on the NATO process. The churches reiterated their earlier call (see Europe Update N° 24) in March to withdraw US nuclear weapons from Europe and requested the new NATO Strategic Concept to mark the end of reliance on nuclear weapons. According to the churches this is the only way to truly enable the process to proceed towards a world free of nuclear weapons. The churches' letter in March received replies from several governments of NATO member states and from NATO's then Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer.

Council of Europe

Swiss Presidency of the Council of Europe focuses on human rights

In a press release issued on 18 November, the first day of the Swiss Presidency of the Council of Europe (CoE), the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches (FSPC) welcomed the commitment of the Presidency to strengthen the European Court of Human Rights. This institution, linked to the CoE, monitors the respect of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) by the 47 CoE Member States. Since the enlargement of the CoE following the end of the division of Europe and the establishment of the current full-time Court system, this institution has been confronted with extraordinary challenges which go considerably beyond its current capabilities. Today some 97.000 cases are pending before the Court. The Protocol 14 which was signed in 2004 but is not yet ratified by Russia and the Protocol 14bis, signed in May 2009, seek to increase the efficiency of the Court. This is done, inter alia, by allowing the Court to "filter" out cases that are less likely to succeed along with those that are broadly similar to cases previously brought against the same Member State. During its Presidency, Switzerland will seek the further ratification of these Protocols as well as ensure re-affirmation of CoE Member States to guarantee the rights defined in the ECHR.

In addition, the FSPC recalled the commitment of the CoE to intercultural dialogue and encouraged the six-month Swiss Presidency to promote this work. With their principle of unity in reconciled diversity the Protestant churches have played a part in shaping this culture. The CSC staff person seconded by the FSPC to CSC Strasbourg office to work on this topic is just one expression of the Swiss contribution.

Finally, the FSPC drew attention to the involvement of international non-governmental organisations (INGO's) in the CoE's work and asked the Swiss representation to further strengthen this cooperation during the Presidency. Through the Conference of INGO's, the churches "can make the Christian contribution to a social consensus on values".

Read the Press Release of FSPC at:

http://www.sek-feps.ch/en/media/press-releases/nn_communique/2009/091118-swiss-presidency-of-the-council-of-europe-priority-human-rights.html

Priorities of the Swiss CoE Presidency:

[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Inf\(2009\)49&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Inf(2009)49&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383)

Background information on the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe (CoE) was founded in the aftermath of the Second World War in 1949. In order to prevent European citizens to ever go through the cruelties of such a war again, the organisation focused on the promotion of democracy, the preservation of human rights and law and order in Europe. The CoE can be seen as safeguard of European values.

The CoE consists of four pillars:

The Committee of Ministers (CM) is the CoE's highest decision-making body and consists of foreign ministers or their Strasbourg-based deputies.

The Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) serves as the deliberative body and the driving force for the work of the CoE. In PACE meetings, members of national parliaments debate policies for adoption which are then submitted to governments for action.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is the voice of Europe's 200.000 regions and municipalities and provides a forum where elected representatives can discuss common problems, pool their experiences and develop policies.

The Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) gathers some 400 international NGOs. It provides links between politicians and the public and brings the voice of civil society to the CoE. CSC is an active member of the INGO Conference and also maintains good relations with the Strasbourg representations of CoE Member States, as well as with members of PACE and CoE civil servants.

Moreover, internationally, the best known and most important body linked to the CoE is the *European Court of Human Rights*. Its jurisdiction is compulsory for all contracting parties. The *Commissioner for Human Rights* is an independent body responsible for promoting education, awareness and respect for human rights. Since 2005, this post has been held by Mr Thomas Hammarberg.

Since this autumn the CoE has been led by the former President of the Norwegian Parliament, Mr Thorbjørn Jagland.

Human Rights

EU anti-trafficking day: CCME calls for human rights to be at the centre of the EU policies against trafficking in persons

On the occasion of the EU annual anti-trafficking Day (18 October), the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) reiterated its plea to the EU institutions to put human rights at the centre of the EU anti-trafficking policies. In a joint effort with some other international networks combating trafficking in human beings (e.g. Amnesty international and La Strada International), CCME focused on two main activities.

On 6 October, CCME and partners debated “EU perspectives on a Human Rights Approach To Trafficking” in the European Parliament. The event, attended by MEPs and advisers from all main political groups, focused on the role of the EP in the adoption of the new framework decision on trafficking in human beings. This piece of legislation will now under the Lisbon Treaty be decided on with the EP as co-legislator. The EP rapporteur Anna Hedh expressed her wish for a more coherent advice of civil society organizations on this issue.

On 19 October, CCME issued a joint statement with other international networks addressing the EU Ministerial Conference on Trafficking, which took place in Brussels that day. The statement called for a holistic and rights-based approach to trafficking and drew the EU Member States’ attention to the ways their own policies in third countries might be contributing to root causes of trafficking. The eight networks reminded EU member states of their earlier unfulfilled commitments to adopt legislation protecting trafficked persons and to appoint national rapporteurs on trafficking.

The full statement is available on:

<http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/Final%20NGO%20statement%2018%20October%202009.pdf>

European Commission against racism and intolerance focuses in 2010 on Armenia, Cyprus, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Russia and Spain

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) is an independent CoE body specialised in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance. Its action covers all measures needed to combat violence, discrimination and prejudice against persons or groups of persons on the grounds of their race, colour, language, religion, nationality or national or ethnic origin. One of ECRI’s main activities is the country-to-country monitoring. In that framework ECRI examines the situation concerning manifestations of racism and intolerance in each of CoE Member States. These reports are informed by country visits and confidential dialogues with the national authorities. The monitoring takes place in five-year cycles, covering nine to ten countries per year. In 2010 the focus is on Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Monaco, Russia and Spain. CEC member churches from the concerned countries wishing to explore the possibility of participation in the monitoring visits, please contact Executive Secretary Carla Maurer (carla.maurer@cec-kek.fr/+33 3 88 15 27 60). For more information about ECRI: <http://www.coe.int/ecri>

Religion in the Public Sphere

Swiss Ban of minarets signals need for strengthened dialogue

On 29 November, the Swiss people approved the initiative to ban minarets by a constitutional change. The reactions of solidarity towards Muslim citizens that this triggered all over Europe and especially in Switzerland show there is a wish to better address feelings of insecurity and uncertainty among citizens. The Swiss Council of Religions claims that “all involved parties must intensify their efforts in the field of integration... The decision of the Swiss electorate should not be instrumentalized to deduce a general anti-Islamic sentiment”. The dialogue between religious communities has to continue on all levels. “The minaret ban will not solve any problems but will create new ones”, the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches (FSPC) deplored in a public statement. According to FSPC, “Religious communities now have a special responsibility to make a contribution to a peaceful coexistence.” Despite the Swiss Government’s clear disapproval of the initiative and despite a large anti-initiative campaign, where FSPC had a central role, 57 % of the Swiss population voted in favour of it.

Press Release of the FSPC:

http://www.sek-feps.ch/en/media/press-releases/nn_communique/2009/091129-council-of-religions-calls-for-intensification-of-integration-efforts.html

Crucifix banned from Italian classrooms

Recently, the visibility of religious symbols in the public space heated feelings in Italy as well. In November, the European Court of Human Rights ruled against the presence of crucifixes in classrooms in Italy. The case was brought by a Finnish-Italian mother who wanted to give her children a secular education. The Strasbourg Court stipulated as follows: “The compulsory display of a symbol of a given confession in premises used by the public authorities... restricted the right of parents to educate their children in conformity with their convictions.”

Many politicians in Italy reacted angrily and the Italian Government stated that it would appeal against the decision. Minister for Education Mariastella Gelmini called the crucifix a “symbol of our tradition” not that of Catholicism. Another minister called the ruling “shameful” and a third claimed that Europe was forgetting its Christian heritage. Domenico Maselli, the President of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, welcomed the Court’s ruling “because it repeats the idea that the freedom of religion and respect for all faiths are at the basis of a peaceful and civil Europe”.

Press Release of the ECHR:

<http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?action=html&documentId=857732&portal=hbkm&source=externalbydocnumber&table=F69A27FD8FB86142BF01C1166DEA398649>

Upcoming events

French invite to celebrate 60 years of European integration

The French Catholics, under the leadership of Bishop François Maupu of Verdun and Bishop Pierre Raffin of Metz, invite CEC churches to a celebration of the 60th anniversary of the European Act of Robert Schuman, the Declaration of 9 May 1950. The event, which will issue a Schuman Declaration, will take place in Verdun (7 May), Douaumont and Scy-Chazelles (8 May) and Metz (9 May). For more information, visit www.9mai2010.eu or contact Father Cédric Burgun (cedrid@burgun.eu).



Church and Society Commission

Ecumenical Centre • Rue Joseph II, 174 • BE-1000 Brussels • Belgium
phone +32 2 230 17 32 • fax +32 2 231 14 13 • www.cec-kek.org

Edited by Elina Eloranta

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://www.cec-kek.org/content/EuropeUpdates.shtml>

Issued 10.12.2009.