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CSC Update on European Affairs

The German EU Presidency

Churches meet with the Presidency

In the series of meetings with the rotating Presidency of the European Union, members of CEC's Church and Society Commission (CSC-CEC) and COMECE, as well as representatives of the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) and the German Bishops' Conference, met with the German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on 15 January. Germany took over the EU Presidency from Finland on 1 January 2007 for the first half of the year. The main item on the German Presidency agenda is the future of the Constitutional Treaty. The Presidency is foreseen to conclude a road map and a timetable for continuing the process as well as the "outlines of the contents" for a draft text. These are to be presented in June 2007. Furthermore, the German Presidency coincides with the 50th anniversary of the European Community's founding document, the Treaty of Rome. In order to celebrate the event, the EU is preparing a declaration under the Presidency's leadership, which will be approved in the informal meeting of the Heads of States and Governments on 25 March in Berlin.

The Berlin Declaration and the Constitutional Treaty, not surprisingly, were therefore the main subjects of the meeting with Foreign Minister Steinmeier. He explained that the expectations are very high. The Berlin Declaration aims to be an inspiring 2 ½ pages long document, which refers to the history of the European project, to its shared values and future perspectives. Due to the sensitivity regarding the simultaneously ongoing constitutional process, the preparation of the declaration is a particularly tricky mission. Germany is careful not to disturb the constitutional process by references to it that might give rise to opposition.

Steinmeier shared the churches' perspective, that the EU must be a value-based community, and that as much as possible of the present text of the Constitutional Treaty referring to shared values and their implementation should be safeguarded. He welcomed the contributions of churches, which were handed over to him. Furthermore, he encouraged the churches to make use of their ecumenical contacts and structures to contribute to the debate on Europe within churches in order to make Europe a Europe of the people.

The churches also expressed their views regarding other issues on the German Presidency agenda. In view of potential future enlargements and the EU's neighbourhood policy, the churches welcomed the conclusions of the EU's recent debate on the integration capacity (see the article on integration capacity in this update), which reaffirmed the EU's intention to keep the doors open for candidate countries from the Western Balkans. With regard to Turkey, the church representatives and the Foreign Minister agreed that human rights issues, including religious freedom, must figure high on the agenda. An effective neighbourhood policy should include the Central Asian Republics as well as Northern Africa.

Following the European Commission's recent communication on climate change (COM (2007) 2), the churches welcomed the targets set by the EU. But they emphasised that for them nuclear energy could certainly not be a sustainable solution. Churches demand resources to be allocated to research and programmes in the areas of energy sufficiency and changed lifestyles. The German Government aims to broker an international agreement to follow the current commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, which ends in 2012.

The churches' representatives also advocated for the enhancement of the civil capacity of the EU in conflict prevention and peace keeping. Recent reports on arms trade give a rather threatening picture.

In relation to migration, the churches emphasised clear, fair and transparent European standards as part of return policies as well as increased contingents for refugees to be settled in the EU countries. With regard to migration and development, the churches advocated a greater coherence in the involved policy areas and additional resources.

The German Foreign Minister and the churches agreed to keep in touch during the Presidency. The churches will be involved in relevant events organised by the Presidency.

The German EU Presidency Programme including information on foreseen conferences: <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/de/EU-P/Programm-EU-P-en.pdf>

The official Presidency website: <http://www.eu2007.de/en/index.html?null>

European Integration

Next steps relating to the Constitutional Treaty

The previous Finnish EU Presidency held confidential consultations with the Member States regarding the constitutional process in the autumn 2006. Due to its highly sensitive nature, it was agreed that no written conclusions would be formulated out of the discussions. However, the Finnish Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen gave an oral report at the December European Council. He had drawn the following conclusions of the consultations:

- All States agree that the reform of current (in force) Treaty is necessary.

- It is inconceivable to start from scratch.
- Most members would like to keep either the Constitutional treaty or at least as much of its substance as possible.

There also seems to be a broad consensus on the need to drop the word “constitutional” from the title of the Treaty to make it more neutral.

The German Chancellor is foreseen to send a letter to Member States regarding the process at an early stage of its presidency. On January 26 European Ministers of those 18 countries that have ratified the Treaty will meet in Madrid. All Member States will discuss the Treaty on 27 February in Luxemburg.

The future of the Constitutional Treaty also depends on the results of the French Presidential elections that will be held on 22 April (and if necessary on 6 May).

The ratification of the “Constitutional Treaty” was blocked in the summer 2005 after the “no” vote of France and the Netherlands. At present, 20 out of 27 EU member states have ratified the text.

Integration capacity and the Enlargement Strategy

The December European Council took part in a recent newly-heated debate on EU’s integration capacity (the term absorption capacity was replaced by this more neutral expression) and more precisely on the problem of the Union’s effectiveness in relation to new potential future enlargements. Following the European Commission document on the Enlargement Strategy and on integration capacity, as well as the European Parliament’s reactions to it, the December Summit agreed to place enlargement and consolidation on an equal footing (the question of parallelism). It also stated that “as the Union enlarges, successful European integration requires that EU institutions function effectively and that EU policies are further developed and financed in a sustainable manner”.

Member States approved a new Enlargement Strategy based on consolidation, conditionality and communication, combined with the EU’s capacity to integrate new members. The Summit also promised to keep its commitments towards the countries that are in the enlargement process.

In concrete terms, it was concluded that Candidate countries must respect Copenhagen criteria as well as to explain the enlargement policy to their citizens in order for the EU “to have the citizens with us”. On the other hand, the EU should further consolidate its *acquis communautaire*.

Commenting the new strategy for future accessions, Prime Minister Vanhanen said that “the prospect of membership - the knowledge that the Union is open to new members - is essential to stability in Europe.” He also said that the limits of enlargement are not based on geography but on values.

For further reading:

December Summit conclusions including the new enlargement strategy.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/92202.pdf

Commission's proposal regarding the Enlargement Strategy and integration capacity.

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2006/Nov/com_649_strategy_paper_en.pdf

European Parliament report on the integration capacity.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/registre/recherche/NoticeDetaillee.cfm?docid=209326&doclang=EN>

European Parliament report on the Enlargement Strategy.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A6-2006-0436+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN&language=EN>

Intercultural dialogue

Intercultural dialogue in the Council of Europe

Intercultural dialogue has been an issue within the Council of Europe (CoE) for more than 30 years. Realising the necessity of intercultural dialogue as part of successful integration, it was first approached in the field of education. Starting in the 1980's, the focus shifted from integration to intercultural dialogue as part of democratic education. Intercultural dialogue was recognized as being essential for cultivating and promoting democratic values such as tolerance and peace. The ethnic conflicts in the 1990's as well as 9/11 prompted the CoE to intensify its efforts in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue as a means to prevent conflicts and to fight terrorism in a non-violent manner.

In 2005 the CoE's Committee of Ministers named intercultural dialogue as one of its main priorities and decided on the preparation of a White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, which is due to be published this year. The consultation process regarding the document has now been launched. The consultation document poses the religious communities the following questions:

- What is the place of religious communities in a policy promoting intercultural dialogue? Which significance has the dialogue among religious communities?
- Should the Council of Europe engage in dialogue with religious communities? If yes: how?

It is now interesting to see whether the consultation will lead to a similar development as the one within the EU, which materialised in the art. 52 on the open, transparent and regular

dialogue with churches and non-confessional organizations foreseen in the Constitutional Treaty.

The Strasbourg office of the CSC-CEC has been invited to take part in this process both as a member of the Conference of the INGOs at the CoE and as an organisation of religious communities. That includes participating in the conference on religious communities to be held in San Marino 23-24 April 2007.

The consultation document is available from the CSC Strasbourg office: csc@cec-kek.fr. The Strasbourg office welcomes any material on the religious dimension of the intercultural dialogue as well as examples of good practices regarding the relations of churches with public authorities.

For background information on the white paper process:

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=986313&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75>

Faro declaration on the CoE's strategy for developing intercultural dialogue (2005):

http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_cooperation/youth/5_information_services/forum_21/N5-6_Faro_Declaration.pdf

The reader of the Conference on the religious dimension of the intercultural education:

http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_cooperation/education/intercultural_education/EDGIV_EDU_DIAL_2004_%2010%20repertoire1.pdf

European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008)

In December the EU reached a decision regarding objectives and resources available for the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008. The aims of the theme year are to raise awareness – particularly among young people – on the importance of engaging in intercultural dialogue. It seeks to identify best practises and new approaches in promoting intercultural dialogue, foster the roles of education and media in promoting understanding of other cultures and the principle of equality. The year also aims to raise the profile of the EU in its work regarding intercultural dialogue. In concrete terms, the EU has a budget of 10 million Euros to support events and initiatives on a European, national and regional level related to above-mentioned objectives. The EU will also support information and promotion campaigns.

For more information, read the Council decision:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_412/l_41220061230en00440050.pdf

Social Policies

Consultation on health services

The European Commission is currently holding a public consultation on health services. Following the removal of health services from the scope of the directive on services in the internal market (which was adopted in December 2006, see the update 3/2006), the Commission is now reflecting on how to approach this particular area. To that end, it is collecting information on the specificities of health services. The aim is to improve legal certainty, particularly on cross-border care, improve cost efficiency and facilitate co-operation of national health systems for example through mobility of health professionals. The concrete questions include e.g. what practical issues need to be clarified for citizens who wish to seek healthcare in other Member States and how to ensure a proper financial compensation mechanism for cross-border healthcare. Deadline of the consultation is 31 January 2007.

Member States have already given broad guidance on the matter by issuing a “Statement on common values and principles in EU health systems” at the ‘Health’ Council of 1 June 2006.

CSC-CEC and Eurodiaconia are currently preparing a joint response to the communication focusing mainly on ethical issues relating to health care.

The communication is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_overview/co_operation/mobility/docs/comm_health_services_comm2006_en.pdf

More information on the consultation:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_overview/co_operation/mobility/patient_mobility_en.htm

The Statement on common values and principles is included in the Council minutes:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/06/st09/st09658.en06.pdf>

Read also the church contribution to the Green Paper on mental health:

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

European Parliament

New leadership

On 16 January the MEPs elected a German, Hans-Gert Poettering (EPP-ED), as the President of the European Parliament. This ended the 2-½ year term of Josep Borrell (PES). According to the agreement made at the beginning of the Parliament’s 5-year term, the two largest groups, the conservative European People’s Party and the Socialist group, divide the Presidency.

New party

The arrival of MEPs from the two new Member States, Bulgaria and Romania, gave for the first time far-right MEPs enough seats to get organised under a political grouping called "Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty" (ITS). The affair has raised concerns with other political groups. Martin Schulz, leader of the Socialist group, has appealed to other political groups not to allow ITS to obtain any positions of responsibility.

Equal opportunities

European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007)

The European theme for the year 2007 is equal opportunities. The Year of Equal Opportunities has three key aims:

1. to make European Union citizens aware of their right to non-discrimination and equal treatment;
2. to promote equal opportunities for all - access to employment, education, in the workplace or in the health sector;
3. to promote benefits of diversity for the European Union.

One of the activities organised is an "Equality Summit" that will take place on 30-31 January in Berlin. That is the first time that ministers, social partners and non-governmental organisations will gather together to consider the themes of equal opportunities and non-discrimination. CSC-CEC will be represented by its Director, Rüdiger Noll.

The official website of the theme year:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equality2007/index_en.htm

To learn more about what the EU is doing to combat discrimination, visit:

<http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/s22002.htm>

Publications

Learn about refugee resettlement

Between 2005 and 2006, Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe carried out a project "Understanding resettlement in practice: capacity building for action!". Resettlement is a tool of refugee protection: refugees who found temporary shelter in a first country but who cannot stay there permanently are resettled to another country for permanent protection. The project had two aims: to make resettlement better known, and to understand the different approaches in current resettlement programmes. The results of the project are now published.

Download the booklet "Resettlement: Protecting Refugees, Sharing Responsibility. Findings from the Project "Understanding Resettlement in Practice" at:

<http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/Refugee%20Resettlement%20Booklet2006.pdf>

For hardcopies contact: info@ccme.be.

A new CCME-project on resettlement will run throughout 2007. Information on it, including the regular "resettlement newsletter" can be found on www.ccme.be.



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