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The Ethical Dimension of the “EU 2020” Strategy

Response of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC of CEC) to the Public Consultation of the European Commission on the “EU 2020” Strategy (COM (2009) 647)

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1. Fundamental Rights and Values as a Key Priority for the “EU 2020” Strategy

The Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force on 1st December 2009, provides the EU with a new legal framework based on the values and objectives on which the Union is built, introducing the Charter of Fundamental Rights into European primary law, providing for new solidarity mechanisms and ensuring better protection of European citizens. In the “Political Guidelines for the New Commission”, Commission President **José Manuel Barroso** points out the importance of this value basis for EU’s policies:

“The crisis that we face is not just a financial or an economic crisis. It is also a crisis for the values of our societies. ... For Europe, this is a moment of truth. Europe has to answer a decisive question. Do we want to lead, shaping globalisation on the basis of our values and our interests – or will we leave the initiative to others and accept an outcome shaped by them?”¹

The European Churches have been disappointed to see that the value basis of the European Union, as laid out in the Treaty of Lisbon, has hardly been taken up in the Working Document of the European Commission on the future “EU 2020” strategy. The Working Document refers to the Lisbon Treaty several times with regard to new governance structures, but it hardly takes the content of the new Treaty into account. The Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches would therefore like to encourage the European Union and its Member states to strengthen the ethical dimension of the future “EU 2020” strategy.

We suggest adding as a fourth key priority for the future “EU 2020” strategy:

(4) Implementing fundamental rights and values in a sustainable social market economy

¹ José Manuel Barroso. Political guidelines for the next Commission. Brussels, September 2009, p. 1. http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/pdf/press_20090903_EN.pdf

2. Rationale for the Implementation of Fundamental Rights and Values as a Key Priority for the “EU 2020” Strategy

In the introduction, the Working Document of the European Commission mentions the vision that a “Europe that is open to the world will continue to be a model for others to follow, projecting its values and fostering stronger labour, environmental, and safety standards around the globe.” Unfortunately this concept is not further developed in the strategy nor is the implementation of EU’s value basis made evident in the proposal for the “EU 2020” strategy.

The Working Document speaks about the need for a “good analysis” as basis for EU’s future economic, social and environmental framework strategy. **The European Churches are convinced that the current crisis is much more profound than the Working Document of the European Commission suggests.** The crisis calls into question a number of assumptions, which have underpinned the EU’s economic policies over the last decades, such as deregulation, the primacy of economic criteria in all areas of life as well as an overemphasis on profit and growth. The current crisis is to a large extent a crisis of trust towards the financial and political institutions and towards the system, which provoked it.

The European Churches support the analysis of the President of the European Commission, Juan Manuel Barroso, that the ongoing financial and economic crisis has an important ethical dimension. The churches see EU’s societies suffering from a lifestyle which is focusing on individual profit, consumption and greed rather than taking responsibility for the common good, the well-being and the future for all people and for the world we are living in. Assuming that this approach is correct, the churches are concerned that the measures suggested by the Working Document of the European Commission do not solve the problem, but may simply deal with its symptoms.²

Providing framework conditions for the market alone is not enough. A socially, ecologically, and globally committed market economy is morally far more demanding than is generally realised. In order to endure, its structures must be embedded in a system of values supported by all relevant stakeholders. Individual self-interest, a crucial structural component of a market economy, may deteriorate into destructive egoism. It is an ethical task to balance self-interest with economic, social and ecological responsibility.

The success of the social market economy scheme substantially depends on the value basis and the ethical behavior of all stakeholders. In a global and interdependent economy, in which the risks of abuse have sharply increased, it is more imperative than ever to increase awareness of moral obligations and social values and to sharpen consciences.

Therefore we would like to encourage the EU and its Member States to translate EU’s values more strongly into the implementation of economic, social and environmental policies.

² Cf. the Open Letter to the Presidents of the EU Institutions from 6 May 2009. “The Economic Crisis is a Call for Change.” http://csc.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/csc/Social_Economic_Issues/Openletter5May2009.pdf

3. Examples for the Ethical Dimension of a Sustainable Social Market Economy

Education

The Working Document of the European Commission mentions “reading, mathematics and science” as basic skills, but ignores the necessity of basic social skills like responsibility, solidarity, tolerance and respect for others. The European Council in May 2009 stated in its strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training 2020: **“Education should promote intercultural competences, democratic values and respect for fundamental rights and the environment, as well as combat all forms of discrimination, equipping all young people to interact positively with their peers from diverse backgrounds.”** These elements are missing in the “EU 2020” strategy.

Education enhances lives. It ends generational cycles of poverty and disease and provides a foundation for sustainable development. A rights-based approach to education would address some of societies’ deeply rooted inequalities.³

Ethics in Science and New Technologies

Research, innovation, and creativity are not value-free spaces. The European Commission has already started embedding ethics in its policies on research, food production, biotechnology, and some other policy areas. An important task for the future is to provide for proper reflection on ethics in all areas of science and technology and to promote shared values and human rights protection in the implementation of all EU policies. We would encourage the EU to **establish an impact assessment on the ethical dimension of all its policies** based on the experiences with the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies.⁴

Solidarity

The practice of solidarity is not only an essential element of Christian faith, but also a precondition for a socially cohesive society for all and, as such, an important pillar of European economic and social policies. The “EU 2020” strategy is to be contrasted with the commitment to fundamental social rights and to the principles of solidarity and social cohesion in the Treaty of Lisbon. For the churches, **the commitment “to empowering people in inclusive societies” means ensuring that all people in Europe are enabled to live a dignified life**, particularly through the sustainable provision of quality social and health services, essential to ensure that people are in a position to take up opportunities. Behind this stands the conviction that social politics are primarily legal politics. Social protection – this is a key element of all European social models, however multifaceted, - is not a question of charity, but a legal claim, a fundamental right, which is justified by human dignity. In economically difficult times it is particularly important to stand for gender solidarity and solidarity with minorities.

In this respect the Working Document’s proposals for inclusive policies fall back behind the objectives of the Lisbon strategy and of other earlier commitments of the EU and its Member States. The proposed initiatives are not sufficient to achieve the aim of inclusive societies. **With regard to the European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, we encourage the European Union and its Member States to define in**

³ Cf. the Joint Answer by CSC, EYCE, WSCF-E and AGDF on the Greenpaper consultation “Promoting the learning mobility of young people” (COM(2009)329).

http://csc.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/csc/Education/CSCJoint_answer_Greenpaper.pdf

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/european_group_ethics/index_en.htm

the “EU 2020” Strategy precise quantitative and qualitative goals for the fight against poverty and social exclusion, implementing the “Millennium goals”.

Employment

The European Churches are concerned about the increasing segmentation of the labour market, with more and more precarious employment situations and the growing marginalisation of specific groups such as long term unemployed, less skilled people, people with disabilities, or people with a migration background. Women are particularly affected by precarious employment situations. One-parent-families and extended families need special attention. Persons in charge of others (children, parents, relatives...) find themselves disadvantaged on the labour market because of their restricted flexibility.

The current situation provides a fundamental challenge to the functioning of the social systems. In Christian understanding, **work is not just a productive factor but also a central element of human personality and of participation in society**. Flexicurity is mentioned in the Working Document as a key strategy for creating new jobs. A basic problem however remains that the flexicurity strategies have at best an indirect influence on the macro-economic development. Where no jobs are available, they cannot be mediated even by increased efforts. If a more flexible labour law facilitates the termination of employment contracts, without an alternative offer of jobs being secured and at the same time the economic crisis forces restrictions on social security systems, the danger exists that flexicurity contributes to the qualitative and quantitative threat to jobs rather than to their protection. The Communication of the European Commission on flexicurity formulates the requirement that **“the EU needs to reinforce the European social models, which are committed to social protection, social cohesion and solidarity**. Workers need sufficient security to plan their lives and careers with support to make it through all these changes and stay in employment. They need opportunities to master new skills and help to move from one job to another. They need protection against bad working conditions. They need good social protection in case a new job is not easily at hand or when employment is no longer a realistic option”.⁵ **The “EU 2020” strategy should assume this earlier commitment of the European Union.**

Sustainability

The economic crisis has to be seen in connection with other major challenges that European societies are facing: climate change, crisis of energy and of water supply, shortage of food, which have a significant impact in many regions of our world. The challenges of demographic change urge the EU and its Member States towards more sustainable policies. A coherent answer to this range of political challenges is required. While we recognise the importance of enhancing the EU efforts in the fields of economy and employment, we stress even more the importance of an overall **coherence** of EU policies. In order to achieve substantive progress with the “EU 2020” agenda, a renewed effort has to be made on the basis of the same values, on which the Lisbon Treaty has been developed. The spirit of the Lisbon Treaty for sustainable development truly integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions must be implemented.

⁵ Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity: More and better jobs through flexibility and security COM(2007) 359, p. 7.

Subsidiarity and Participation

The Commission's Working Document describes the need for "increased policy co-ordination, better synergies through effective subsidiarity, and strengthened partnership between the EU and Member States" as a precondition for a sustainable social market economy. Compared to the Christian understanding of subsidiarity this is a reduced interpretation of the principles of subsidiarity and participation restricting policy making to the European Institutions and the Member States and ignoring an active involvement of people in the implementation of European policies. The European churches are convinced that **improving democratic participation in EU processes** is decisive for the future of Europe as the EU tries to regain its peoples' trust. We would therefore ask the EU Member States to **make the "EU 2020" strategy more transparent and allow a better participation in the process**, increasing the participation of Europe's people in the development and implementation of its policies. Synergy effects do not only exist in partnership between EU Institutions and Member States, but also in the active involvement of other stakeholders like the social partners, the civil society, and the faith communities (cf. Art 17 TEU).

4. Conclusion

The European Churches believe that the implementation of fundamental rights and values should be at the centre of the new "EU 2020" strategy. Taking the new value basis of the Treaty of Lisbon into account, the implementation of EU's values and principles must be a key priority for EU's economic, social, and ecological strategy in the forthcoming decade. To quote the President of the Commission once again:

"Europe has managed to develop a social market economy and a model of society that surpasses the destructive dichotomy of unregulated markets or over-powerful states. Our common history and experience show that the answers to today's challenges do not lie in the market alone, nor in the state alone. They must come from society so that they can respond to people's needs. We must put human dignity at the heart of our endeavours. A values based approach provides the right foundation for the pragmatic task of delivering solutions for our citizens."⁶ (José Manuel Barroso)

The Church and Society Commission (CSC) is one of the commissions of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). The CSC links CEC's some 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). Its task is to help the churches study church and society questions from a theological social-ethical perspective, especially those with a European dimension, and to represent common positions of the member churches in their relations with political institutions working in Europe.

⁶ José Manuel Barroso. Political guidelines for the next Commission. Brussels, September 2009, p. 2. http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/pdf/press_20090903_EN.pdf