



Conference of European Churches
Conférence des Églises Européennes
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CSC Update on European Affairs

TOPICS COVERED:

Church leaders meet with the Presidents of the European institutions, CSC meets with one of the Founding Fathers, Constitutional debate, intercultural dialogue, first EU strategy on culture, transparency, framework decision on racism and xenophobia, trafficking in human beings.

Churches in dialogue with European leaders

Church leaders meet with Presidents of the European institutions

On 15 May 2007, the Presidents of the European institutions met with representatives of the three monotheistic religions. The third high-level meeting of this kind was organised upon the initiative of the President of the European Commission. The topic chosen for this year's discussion was "Building a Europe based on human dignity".

In his intervention Rev. Jean-Arnold de Clermont, President of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) stressed that promoting human dignity and human rights as well as tolerance must be central to the European integration process.

The meeting stressed both the need for a theological reflection on human dignity and the need to make human dignity the overarching value to be applied to concrete areas of European policy, such as migration, development policy and the 7th research framework programme.

Commission President José Manuel Barroso said: "Neither geographical proximity nor a shared history suffices to cement a lasting union between States and peoples. Key to the process of integration between the Member States of the European Union and between their citizens is the universal values underlying our common heritage".

Chancellor Angela Merkel, President of the Council of the European Union, emphasised that politics depends on preconditions which it cannot generate itself. For this reason, the dialogue with the religious communities, which are important players in civil society and contributors to the value basis of European societies, is so important. She expects the “open, transparent and regular” dialogue between the religious communities and the European institutions to continue under future EU presidencies. President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering echoed the need for more permanent contacts.

For more information on the meeting, please consult the CEC Press Release at: <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/pr-cq0723e.shtml>

CSC meets with one of the Founding Fathers

In May Rüdiger Noll (Director of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches CSC/CEC) and Laurens Hogebrink (former CSC Commission member) met with Max Kohnstamm, one of the Founding Fathers of Modern Europe. Now 93 years old, the first General Secretary of the European Coal and Steel Community remains confirm that “values by themselves don’t mean anything. They must be translated into legislation.” Read our feature story on the discussion with Max Kohnstamm annexed to this Europe Update.

European Integration

Constitutional debate

At the moment, rationalism seems to be gaining ground over idealism in the debate about the EU Constitutional Treaty. The German EU Presidency, which has done its utmost to preserve the present treaty proposal, is now seeking to find a compromise between the promoters of minimum reforms (UK, France, Netherlands, Poland, the Czech Republic) and those having more substantial reform ambitions by suggesting to divide the treaty into two parts. The basic treaty (\approx the current Part I) would contain institutional arrangements, competencies, objectives and values. It would be accompanied by a separate text concerning policies (\approx the current Part III) with indication whether the decisions in these policy areas would be taken by unanimity or qualified majority voting.

In general, there seems to be a broad agreement to remove all the constitutional elements (title, symbols, preamble - including reference to Christianity etc.) from the scope of the treaty. The content of the Part I is least likely to be touched but even this cannot be guaranteed. The preservation of the Part I would be crucial to churches as it includes the articles regarding values, the status of churches and religious communities and their relations with the European institutions (“open, transparent and regular dialogue, art 52), as well as the article which stipulates the EU accession to the European

Convention on Human Rights. On the contrary, the status of the Charter for Fundamental Rights (Part II) is very insecure. The majority of EU countries would like to preserve it but the UK wants it deleted. There are also talks of only having a reference to the Charter in one article but whether the Charter in that case would have legal force or not is once again an issue being debated.

Besides the exercise of cutting the text, some policy areas might be reinforced. The German Presidency has been told to be working on additional protocols on social Europe, climate change and energy security.

The report of the European Parliament Committee on Constitutional Affairs reaffirms its endorsement of the content of the Constitutional Treaty and states that it will not accept any outcome of the negotiations, which does not improve democracy, transparency and citizens' rights. It also calls the Member States to agree a common approach in the fields of climate change, energy security, migration policy, fight against terrorism, dialogue between civilisations, European social model and economic governance of the euro-zone. The report, which represents Parliament's contribution to the constitutional debate will be discussed and voted at the EP plenary session on 5-6 June.

The drastic curtailing and modification of the treaty would allow the French, Dutch and UK governments to announce that the Constitutional Treaty has been buried and, yet, push through a number of reforms in the form of an institutional treaty or as changes to the existing treaties. On the other hand, the former President of the European Commission and the current head of Italian Government Romano Prodi has joined the Belgium Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt (among others) calling for a two-speed Europe in case, the final compromise would not satisfy the countries wanting more integrated Europe.

Germany is now making its last efforts to prepare the talks at the European Council meeting of 21-22 June. The Summit will agree on the mandate of the Intergovernmental Conference foreseen to take place during the Portuguese Presidency on the second half of this year.

For more detailed information on the process and CSC involvement in it, please, read the updated CSC Report on the Constitutional Debate June 2007 annexed to this Europe Update.

Intercultural Dialogue

San Marino conference discussed the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue

As announced in the previous Europe Updates, the Council of Europe is preparing a White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. In the framework of this process a conference entitled "The religious dimension of intercultural dialogue" was in held in San Marino

on 23-24 May 2007. Over 130 participants, among them CSC representatives, discussed the implications of cultural and religious diversity in Europe for the strengthening of European co-operation based on shared values. In the final declaration, which can be found on the website indicated below, participants state, that in view of its achievements in standard setting and competence in the field of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, the Council of Europe provides a particularly appropriate framework for promoting intercultural dialogue and enhancing its religious dimension. They also note that the participation of women in intercultural dialogue is very important.

The website of the San Marino conference:

http://www.coe.int/T/dg4/intercultural/sanmarino_EN.asp#TopOfPage

Council of Europe proposes an annual exchange with religious communities

In May the Council of Europe's decision making body, the Committee of Ministers, adopted a Proposal for an annual exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue with representatives of religious communities, civil society as well as experts active in this area. After the first such meeting, scheduled to take place early 2008, the Council of Ministers will decide on whether to organise these meetings on a regular basis.

Link to the Proposal:

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1129105&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75>

CSC and CCME reflect intercultural dialogue

In the last Europe Update we told that CSC and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) are preparing a joint response to the Council of Europe's consultation on intercultural dialogue. Our invitation for member churches and organisations to provide us with their reflections and best practises was met with a great interest. We would like to thank our members for the close to 30 contributions received.

On 11-12 May 2007 CSC and CCME organised a Task Force meeting together with experts from both constituencies to further brainstorm on the issue. The work on our contribution is now in its late drafting stage.

CSC continues to work on the issue of intercultural dialogue in its plenary meeting in Armenia on 15-19 June 2007.

EU cultural policy

EU launched its first ever strategy on culture

On 10 May 2007 the European Commission adopted an important strategy document on culture. This communication has three main objectives. The first is to promote cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in Europe. The second is to utilise culture as a catalyst for creativity and innovation in the context of the Lisbon Strategy for jobs and growth. The third objective is to ensure that culture becomes a key component in the EU's external relations so as to build bridges with other parts of the world.

The new strategy proposes a co-operative approach between the Commission and EU Member States which is both structured and flexible. This Open Method of Coordination, which has already been used in other policy areas (e.g. social protection, employment), involves agreeing common objectives and regularly following up progress towards them. The Commission has also suggested that a Cultural Forum should be created for consulting stakeholders.

Although the document begins by stating that besides literature and arts, culture embraces ways of life, value systems, traditions and beliefs; religion is only made part of the strategy with regard to external dimension. Here, the Commission suggests particular attention to be paid to multi- and intercultural *and* inter-religious dialogue in EU external and development policies.

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/communication/pdf_word/COM_2007_242_en.pdf

Transparency

Follow-up of the European Transparency Initiative

In the summer 2006, the European Commission organized a broad public consultation in order to give impetus to the European Transparency Initiative (ETI), which intends to create a more structured framework for the activities of lobbyists and to improve commission's minimum standards for consultation. The overriding idea is to increase transparency on the relations between lobbyists and the Commission.

The results of the consultation process were published in a Communication on 21 March 2007 together with a document indicating the way forward. The Commission decided to solve the trouble related to the notion of lobbyist (also shunned by CSC) by introducing the concept of "interest representatives". The Commission will create and launch in spring 2008 a new voluntary register for interest representatives, combining it with a new standard template for internet consultations. The existing CONECCS database will be wound down. The applicants for the register have to subscribe to a "code of

conduct". Similar to the EP code of conduct, it will only include a short list of principles (on ethical questions etc.).

Although the European Commission is going ahead creating the register, there are ongoing discussions with the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee regarding the possibilities of inter-institutional co-operation in this matter.

CSC took part in the Green Paper consultation by issuing a joint position paper with the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) in consultation with CCME, APRODEV, EAALCE and EYCE.

The CSC-COMECE statement: http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/eti/contrib_11.htm

The follow-up document:

http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/eti/docs/com_2007_127_final_en.pdf

The results of the consultation:

http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/eti/docs/DTS_360_EN.pdf

Human Rights

Churches encourage EU Commission to ratify pan European Convention against Trafficking

On occasion of the 2nd anniversary of the adoption of the European Convention against Trafficking, CCME addressed the European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso encouraging the Commission to ratify the Convention.

The letter co-signed by CCME and six other international networks active in the fight against trafficking in human beings underlines that "the Council of Europe Convention strengthens the human rights of people affected by the crime of human trafficking, sets out standards to protect the rights of trafficked persons and offers policy guidance to Party States". It expresses regret that, so far, the Convention has not entered into force as it is still lacking a sufficient number of ratification by member states of the Council of Europe.

Read the letter at:

<http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/CoEC%20letter%20EU%20final070503.pdf>

Read also about an expert meeting on refugee resettlement co-organised by CCME and the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) in Berlin on 14 May 2007.

<http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/BerlinRRPressrelease070514.pdf>

Framework decision on racism and xenophobia adopted

Following six years of negotiations, justice and interior ministers from all 27 EU Member States have finally reached a compromise agreement on the Framework Decision on Racism and Xenophobia by setting out rules that will make the incitement of racism, including genocide denial, a criminal offence.

To accommodate England and Denmark the framework includes several exceptions: Member States will not have to modify their constitutional rules and fundamental principles relating to freedom of association, freedom of the press and the freedom of expression. Britain also pressed successfully for a provision to ensure that attacks on religions are covered only when they are of a xenophobic or racist nature. The sentence "Kill all Christians" would, therefore, not be punishable. The background of this position is the conflict in the Northern Ireland. The Member States can, however, implement the framework decision without this limitation.

Upcoming events

6-10 June, Cologne, Germany: The Kirchentag. Website: www.kirchentag.de

14-15 June, Etchmiadzin: CSC Executive Committee.

15-19 June, Etchmiadzin, Armenia: Annual plenary meeting of CEC's Church and Society Commission.

4-8 September, Sibiu: Third European Ecumenical Assembly.

10-12 October, Brussels: Annual Meeting of Church and Society Secretaries.



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