



THE CATHOLIC CHURCH  
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

# EXTERNAL ACTION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

EU'S COMPETENCES  
CHURCH'S VISION  
COMECE'S CONTRIBUTION

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## EU's competence

The Treaty of Lisbon (2007) established in Article 47 the single **legal personality of the EU**, which has allowed the Union to act in the international arena in a more coherent way. The Lisbon Treaty has also strengthened the External Policy of the EU by establishing the **European External Action Service (EEAS)** – the EU's diplomatic service- whose Head is the **High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy** having at the same time the role of Vice-President of the European Commission. EU's External Action is steered by the European Council and defined by the Foreign Affairs Council. In the sense of a comprehensive approach, the responsibilities for carrying out the External Policy are split between the EEAS and the relevant departments of the European Commission.

Since the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the European Commission has held an exclusive mandate in defining the **Trade Policy of the European Union** and in negotiating on behalf of EU Member States bilateral (e.g. TTIP: Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), regional (EPAs: Economic Partnership Agreements) and multilateral (the “Doha Round” within WTO) trade agreements. With the Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament has gained the right to decide together with the Council on the final outcome of any agreement.

The European Union and its Member States are the world's largest **Development Aid** donor. In 2005, EU Member States pledged to increase Official Development Assistance (ODA) to 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) by 2015. Despite the reiteration by the European Council in June 2014 that this remains a key priority, only four Member States have achieved this target so far. 2015 is a decisive year in which the “*Millennium Development Goals*” agreed by world leaders in 2000 will be replaced by a new set of development goals (the so-called “*Sustainable Development Goals*”) to be adopted at the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2015. The post-2015 agenda intends to fuse development and sustainability goals. Another important event is the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Financing for Development in July 2015 in Addis Ababa. In view of these major events on the world stage the European Union has declared the year 2015 the *European Year for Development*.

Article 49 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) lays down that “*any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union*” after fulfilling the necessary conditions and undergoing the required procedures<sup>1</sup>. In its Work Programme 2015, the European Commission stated that no **EU Enlargement** will take place during the next five years of the Commission's

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<sup>1</sup> Article 2 TEU outlines the values on which the European Union is founded and reads as follows: “The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail”.

mandate. Negotiations with the candidate countries will, however, continue, notably with the Western Balkans<sup>2</sup>.

In 2004, in the context of EU's biggest enlargement, the **European Neighbourhood Policy** (ENP) was created with the objective of avoiding the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and the new neighbours acquired through Enlargement. Article 8 TEU stipulates the responsibility of the EU to work towards transformation of the neighbourhood into a zone of *stability, peace and prosperity* by developing a *special relationship* with its neighbouring countries. This relationship shall be "*founded on the values of the Union and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation*". Currently the European Neighbourhood Policy covers sixteen countries at EU's Eastern and Southern borders grouped in two regional frameworks – the Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean. Through the ENP the EU is offering the neighbouring countries mechanisms for deepening their political association and gradual economic alignment with the EU. In view of the current challenges both at EU's Eastern and Southern borders, the European Commission announced in its [Work Programme](#) for 2015 to launch a review process of the ENP.

The **Common Foreign and Security Policy** was established by the Maastricht Treaty (1992) with the creation of what was then called the *second pillar*. EU's responsibilities in conflict prevention and crisis management were further strengthened by the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997. The position of a High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy was created at that moment. A Political and Security Committee and a European Union Military Committee are the most important permanent structures. The [EU Security Strategy](#) '*A secure Europe in a better world*' was adopted in 2003. At the operational level, the EU has launched several military missions and civilian missions under the Common Security and Defence Policy, mostly in Europe and Africa. Given the very different geopolitical environment and the rise of new challenges and opportunities compared to 2003, the European Council in June 2015 tasked the High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission to prepare a global strategy on foreign and security policy by June 2016, which should replace the out-dated European Security Strategy of 2003.

The EU has adopted a range of guidelines and toolkits for the **promotion of Human Rights worldwide**, including the establishment of a Brussels based Council Working Group on Human Rights (COHOM) and annual Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on UN Human Rights Council/UN General Assembly priorities. In 2012, the [EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy](#) was adopted together with an Action Plan that was [renewed](#) in July 2015. The EU also appointed a Special Representative for Human Rights whose mandate has been extended in early 2015 until the end of February 2017. In 2013, the Council adopted the [EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief](#). A recently created European Parliament Intergroup on *Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance* might become a tool to intensify EU activities in protecting religious minorities worldwide.

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<sup>2</sup> Currently there are five candidate countries (Albania, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey) and two potential candidates (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo).



## Church's vision

In the light of geopolitical developments, the continuing social and economic inequalities and extreme poverty in some parts of the world, gross violations of human rights as well as the rise of new security threats, not least on the EU's doorstep, the Church highlights the importance for the EU to have a greater focus on its External Policies and become a stronger actor on the global scene. Given the history of its Member States, its relative stability and prosperity and rich cultural heritage, the European Union cannot avoid **assuming more responsibilities and show more solidarity also beyond its borders**. To this end also Pope Francis encouraged the EU policy makers during his visit in the European Parliament on 25 November 2014 by [urging](#) the EU to develop “*fair, courageous and realistic policies which can assist the countries of origin in their own social and political development and in their efforts to resolve internal conflicts*”.

The Church recognises that “*trade rules, notwithstanding their technical appearance, have a political and social dimension, with deep and lasting consequences in the life of humanity*”<sup>3</sup>. It stresses that “*trade should benefit people, not just markets and economies*”<sup>4</sup>. The Church favours a multilateral **trade** system “*which will have been truly accomplished when poor countries are able to integrate fully into the international community*”<sup>5</sup>.

As Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical [Populorum Progressio](#) stressed that “*development is the new name for peace*”, **peace-building policies** must not simply strive for the “*absence of war*” but also for a “*more perfect form of justice among men*”. The Church supports all institutional instruments to “*establish universal peace in truth, justice, charity and liberty*”<sup>6</sup>. It encourages initiatives to reduce and finally abolish weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, and to prevent the proliferation of small arms. With a view to creating lasting peace, it promotes *reconciliation and confidence building* efforts both in the prevention and in the aftermath of armed conflicts.

Pope Francis as well as his predecessors have repeatedly underlined the **responsibility of the developed regions for supporting sustainable development across the world**, not least in EU's neighbourhood. Development policies should be conducted in a way that recognises the *dignity of every human being* and addresses the *root causes* of poverty, injustice and inequality, while respecting the *cultural diversity* and the *values* deeply entrenched in the societies of third countries. *Sustainability* – as a principle of comprehensive human development – is to be measured by finding the right balance between social, economic and environmental aspects on the one hand, and on the other

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<sup>3</sup> Ethical Guidelines for International trade, [Note](#) of the Holy See, September 2003.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Pope John XXIII, [Pacem In Terris](#) (163).

hand, meeting the basic needs of the present as well as of future generations, especially the poor and marginalised<sup>7</sup>.

The Social Teaching of the Church attributes a great **importance to the protection and respect for Human Rights**, which “derive directly from the dignity as human person and dignity of every person, and which are therefore universal, inviolable and inalienable”<sup>8</sup> and it stresses that „human rights are to be defended not only individually but also as a whole“ since they „apply to every stage of life and to every political, social, economic and cultural situation“<sup>9</sup>. Of particular significance to the Church is the universal right to **Religious Freedom** which must be guaranteed and protected in all its dimensions – at the *individual* as well as at the *collective* level.<sup>10</sup>



## COMECE's contribution

In order to get better analysis and tools for monitoring and contributing to EU's External Action, COMECE concluded in 2014 a **strategic partnership** with the Conference of European *Justice and Peace* commissions (*Justice and Peace Europe*) enabling a **close and structured cooperation** in the area of External Relations of the EU. *Justice and Peace Europe* is a European network of 31 national *Justice and Peace commissions* established and/or recognised by their respective national Bishops' Conferences. Its objective is to work for the promotion of global social justice, universal peace and respect for human dignity and human rights according to the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church.

COMECE and *Justice and Peace Europe* set up a **joint commission** on the External Relations of the EU (*EXTERN*). It is composed of 15 experts from 12 European countries. The first meeting on 26/27 January 2015 allowed for a series of exchanges with policy makers from the European institutions and adoption of a Plan of Activities.

Instead of focusing on a single specific policy field, *EXTERN* takes a comprehensive view of EU's External Action by following the areas of protection of Human Rights, the Common Security and Defence Policy, Trade Policy, European Neighbourhood and Enlargement Policy and the Development Policy. Thus it endeavours to contribute to a coherent EU External Action that is in line with all the external and internal policies and consistent with the Member States' and EU's foreign policy goals.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. COMECE [Press](#) (20 June 2012), Our common responsibility for tomorrow's world.

<sup>8</sup> Pope John XXIII, [Pacem In Terris](#) (145); see also Catechism of the Catholic Church (2273, 2274).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#) (154-156).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Religious Freedom- Pillar of the Human Rights Policy in the External Relations of the European Union, a [report](#) to the Bishops of COMECE (2010).

In the context of the **review of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy**, *EXTERN* elaborated **proposals** for actions to be included in the renewed Action Plan. The contribution lays a particular emphasis on the full integration of Religious Freedom into EU Human Rights policy priorities and also contains specific proposals for actions in the area of Development Policy and the rights of migrants and asylum seekers.

*EXTERN* also elaborated a contribution to the **European Commission's public consultation** "*Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy*". The joint submission by the Secretariats of *COMECE* and *Justice and Peace Europe* can be downloaded from the website of the European Commission, see [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/neighbourhood/consultation/2\\_civil\\_society.zip](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/neighbourhood/consultation/2_civil_society.zip) . It contains recommendations for making the European Neighbourhood Policy more differentiated, flexible, focused and jointly owned with neighbouring countries and EU Member States.

Further activities of *EXTERN* are envisaged in the context of the ongoing review of the European Security Strategy. Besides direct contributions to the policy debates at the European level, *EXTERN* also regularly informs about specific developments in the relevant areas of EU's External Action. Commented articles on the current happenings in these fields are published in *COMECE's* monthly review *Europe Infos*.



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