



**COMMISSION OF THE EPISCOPATES  
OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY**

**COMECE**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2007**





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## INTRODUCTION

The concluding section of the Annual Report for 2006 listed a series of initiatives to be carried forth in the course of 2007, as follows:

- II(I) The COMECE and its secretariat will continue to monitor European Union policy-making in all relevant domains on behalf of the Bishops' Conferences of the Member States and of the candidate countries. To this end the European Commission's work Programme will be scrutinised in order to identify issues to be followed. Particular attention will be given to consultations launched during the course of the year. The work of the Parliament and Council will also be closely monitored.
- III(I) Close attention will be given to the development of the "constitutional" debate and the initiatives taken to advance reform of the treaties. In this regard particular attention will be given to ensuring that article 1-52 is maintained in any outcome.
- IV(I) Preparation of the COMECE Congress in Rome (23-25 March 2007) will continue. Further contacts will be made with the Holy See, the Italian Bishops' Conference, with various Church organisations, the offices of the European Commission and of the European Parliament, with the Italian government and with the Quirinale in order to prepare the event. The necessary contacts with Member State and EU authorities will be pursued.
- V(I) The work of the the *Comité de Pilotage*, established to assist the secretariat in preparing the Congress and to associate EU officials, representatives of religious congregations and catholic laity networks with planning the event, will be pursued.
- VI(I) The *Comité des Sages*, tasked with preparing a report on the ethical dimension of the European project will hold its final meeting(s) at the secretariat and deliver its report by the end of January. Close contact will be maintained with the two secretaries, M. le Baron Philippe de Schoutheete de Tervarent (B) and Sir Stephen Wall (UK).
- VII(I) COMECE will take part in the meeting of the Co-ordination for Episcopal Conferences in support of the Church in the Holy Land in Jerusalem, 16-19 January.
- VIII(I) COMECE will take part in and make a presentation to the meeting of the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences of South-East Europe, Oradea, 01-04 March.
- IX(I) Efforts to recruit a staff member with specialisation in Islam and international affairs will be intensified, mindful also that 2008 will be the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.
- X(I) The Global Governance Assessment 2006 will be researched and published.
- XI(I) The proceedings of the Summer University 2006 (Graz/Seggau) will be published.
  - a. A follow-up to the document *A Family strategy for the European Union, An Encouragement to make the family an EU Priority* (2004), will be prepared by the secretariat. It will seek to set out concrete proposals for support to parents and marriage in numerous EU policy domains, whilst recognising that family policy is not of EU competence. It will be designed as a series of proposals for consideration by EU policy-makers. It will also serve as a discussion paper for all interested parties in society.

XII Together with the Department for International Affairs of the University of Graz and the Academic Board the Summer University programme for 2007 will be conceived and planned. The secretariat will again engage in fund-raising with a view to raising some 20 burses for the support of the student participants.

XIII COMECE will take part in the second stage of the Third Ecumenical Assembly in Wittenberg (15-18.02). It will also take part in the Assembly in Sibiu, 04-09 September.

XIV As in recent years a visit programme to the EU institutions will be prepared for the Westminster interns. Efforts will be undertaken to investigate the possibility of extending this programme to include the European Parliament, firstly for British candidates – as an extension of the present programme. Thereafter and in the course of 2007 the possibility of “Europeanising” the initiative will be investigated. Both phases will entail securing the spiritual and academic accompaniment of the candidates, both integral parts of the programme

XV The COMECE secretariat together with Mme. C. Roba will give particular attention to developments in regard to the teaching of religion in the European Schools in the course of 2007. It will take all proactive steps to defend its place on the curriculum.

This report indicates that the objectives thus set out for 2007 were achieved.

In the course of the year further initiatives were undertaken in response to the EU agenda.

Germany assumed the EU Presidency on 1 January and sought to advance the Council’s three year strategic programme. The presidency achieved the conclusion of the intergovernmental conference that was charged to find a way out of the institutional imbroglio after referendums in France and the Netherlands had failed. The Lisbon Treaty was signed under Portuguese Presidency in the second half of the year. It is composed of a Treaty of the Union and a Treaty on the functioning of the Union. Upon the signature of the heads of State and Government the ratification process started immediately.

Throughout 2007 both in its plenary sessions and through its secretariat COMECE monitored the work of the two Presidencies, the unfolding of the Work Programme of the European Commission and the relevant initiatives of the European Parliament.

As in former years this report sets out the main activities carried out by COMECE in the course of the year. It does not attempt an exhaustive listing of all the initiatives of the Bishop members and the staff of the secretariat. Its aim is rather to give an overview of the principal activities undertaken in the service of the Bishops’ Conferences and of the building and giving cohesion to the new and enlarged European Union

## **1. COMECE FROM WITHIN**

### **1.1. The President**

- 1.1.1. In 2007 Mgr Adrianus H. van Luyn, Bishop of Rotterdam, continued to exercise an active and effective presidency. Besides presiding over the meetings of the Executive Committee and the Plenary Assembly (see below), he represented COMECE at numerous occasions and gave several speeches in his capacity as President of COMECE.

- 1.1.2. In the course of the year he was present and spoke at the Third Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu. He presided over and took part in several meetings with the presidency of the Council of bishops' conferences in Europe (15-17/2 in Wittenberg, 23 May in Berlin) and took part in the CCEE Plenary Assembly in Fatima (3-7 October)
- 1.1.3. Bishop Adrianus van Luyn spoke at several occasions during the European Congress organised by COMECE in Berlin. He was present at the Taizé prayer for European officials in the Cathedral of Brussels (30/1). He spoke on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of OCIFE in Brussels on "The work of the Church at the level of the European Union" (9/5). In Berlin he addressed an International Symposium of Catholic social work for young people on the subject of "values in the House Europe" (23/5). He delivered another speech to the European society for Catholic Theology on the "Contribution of the Church to European Politics (24/9).

## **1.2. The Executive Committee**

- 1.2.1 The Executive Committee – the President Bishop A. van Luyn, the two Vice-Presidents, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin and Bishop Piotr Jarecki and the Secretary General – met on four occasions in the course of the year. The Apostolic Nuncio to the European Communities was represented. Mr. S. Lunte also took part.
- 1.2.2 The first meeting of the Executive Committee took place at the COMECE secretariat in Brussels on 29 January 2007. The agenda included an exchange of information on recent activities of COMECE, including the meeting of COMECE– together with CSC-CEC – with the German minister for Foreign Affairs Frank Walter Steinmeier which took place on 15 January, and the planned Taizé Day on 30 January. The members of the Executive Committee discussed possible ways to contribute to the declaration of Berlin on European values planned by the Germany Presidency during the March summit of the European Council. They received an update about the preparation of the Rome Congress and discussed the programme of the COMECE plenary assembly to be held on 22 March in Rome. Another matter on the agenda concerned the dialogue of the European institutions and the Churches in view of the first summit meeting including the heads of all three major European institutions in May. Among possible future projects discussed were initiatives concerning the EU-Russia and the EU-China relations.
- 1.2.3 A second meeting of the Executive Committee took place at the Villa Mater Dei in Rome on 21-22 June 2007. At the beginning of the meeting they members of the Executive Committee met Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, the secretary for the relations with states at the secretariat of State in the Vatican. They discussed the elements of a statement of the secretariat on the outcome of the European Council giving a clear and very detailed mandate to another Intergovernmental Conference in order to resolve the European institutional crises. It was noted with satisfaction that the article on the status of Churches and religious communities had been inserted into the proposed Treaty on the functioning of the Union. Another point on the agenda was the evaluation of the Rome Congress.
- 1.2.4 A third meeting of the Executive Committee took place at the COMECE secretariat in Brussels on 24 September 2007. Information was given about the COMECE summer school in Graz, the contribution of COMECE secretariat to the EU commission's consultation on the "School of the XXI century" and other items on the EU agenda. The members of the Executive Committee proceeded on an evaluation about the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu. Another

point on the agenda concerned initiatives to clarify the relations between COMECE and CCEE in view of the CCEE Plenary Assembly in October in Fatima. Finally, the Executive Committee discussed new projects concerning a more structured monitoring of the G8 process through the bishops' conferences, including a possible implication of COMECE, and a series of lectures in the course of the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue in the European Parliament. The meeting concluded with an exchange about possible ideas for the next Plenary Assembly of COMECE.

- 1.2.5 A fourth meeting of the Executive Committee took place at the same venue on 21 November 2007. Scheduled for the morning of the opening day of the Plenary session, its agenda focused on the programme for the Plenary. Having discussed its content and procedure, the President and Vice-Presidents then exchanged on the status of the planned document on marriage and family

### **1.3. THE PLENARY MEETINGS**

- 1.3.1. The Spring meeting took place in Rome on 22 March 2007.

The meeting dealt with the state of the constitutional debate under the German EU presidency, the efforts of the European commission to integrate migration and development policies and the proposal for a COMECE action plan in view of the European year for intercultural dialogue.

The Vice-President of CCEE, Cardinal Josip Bozanić, and Mons. Aldo Giordano, general secretary of CCEE outlined the chief activities of CCEE.

The secretary general gave the latest information concerning the Rome Congress "Values and Perspectives for the European Union", which was held just after the Plenary meeting.

- 1.3.2 The autumn Plenary meeting was held in Brussels on 21-23 November 2007.

The meeting opened with an exchange of bishops on the situation in their respective Churches and Countries. It was followed by an encounter with Mr Jorge Cesar das Neves, the EU commission official in charge with relations to religions, Churches and humanisms.

The meeting dealt with the external action of the Union, its current challenges and perspectives. Mr Klemens Ladenburger from the legal service of the European Commission and Mr Elmar Brok MEP informed the bishops of COMECE about the dispositions of the Lisbon Treaty concerning foreign policy. Mr Pierre Mirel from the Enlargement Directorate general analysed the new Treaty with regard to relations with the Western Balkan countries and Mr. Karl Friedrich Falkenberg from the Trade Directorate general responded in a fourth session to the question whether the new Treaty dispositions would improve EU policies towards Africa.

An evening debate on the Iraqi Refugee crisis attracted about one hundred people.

The bishops of COMECE received the proposal for a EU strategy to support families and marriage, which was prepared by the secretariat of COMECE.

Bishop Egon Kapellari informed about the papal visit to Austria (7-9 September 2007)

A letter of Archbishop Cremona from Malta on the situation of migrants on Malta was discussed and support for steps towards a common European migration policy expressed.

The Annual Report of COMECE's activities in 2006 was presented. It also included a list of activities to be pursued in the course of 2007.

Mons. Aldo Giordano, secretary general of CCEE presented a report of CCEE activities, including the 3 ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, the CCEE plenary meeting in Fatima and a CCEE seminar with SECAM in Ghana (13-18 November 2007).

Mrs Katharina Schauer from the secretariat informed about a series of reports debated in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Further reports were given by staff members on EU related issues.

#### **1.4. AISBL : Association des Episcopats de la C. E.**

- 1.4.1. The Bishop members of COMECE, each delegate of his episcopal conference, are ex officio members of the *Association des Episcopats de la Communauté Européenne, Association sans but lucrative*, AISBL, under Belgian law, the legal figure of COMECE.
- 1.4.2. The *Conseil d'Administration* held a meeting, as did the *Assemblée Générale*, in accordance with the statutes of the AISBL. These meetings were held in the month of November.

#### **1.5. ADMINISTRATION**

- 1.5.1. The administrative dimensions of the COMECE and its secretariat were assured by the Secretary General, who was duly assisted in this respect as indicated in section 1.6.4. of this report.
- 1.5.2. Significant time was devoted to the advancement of the dossier regarding the property and new seat of the secretariat at Sq. de Meeûs, held as ADJUVA s.a., established on 05.12.2006. The Inter-diocesan Centre (of the Belgian Bishops' conference) assisted the General Secretary in co-ordinating this dossier, thus assuring a vital linking of the project with the local Church.

#### **1.6. THE SECRETARIAT**

- 1.6.1. All members of the staff were involved in preparing and achieving the activities and events described in this report.
- 1.6.2. Staff meetings were held regularly in order to execute the decisions of the Plenary meetings, to prepare the forthcoming Plenary meetings, to plan the ongoing work of the secretariat.
- 1.6.3. Mr Henrik Lesaar who worked for several years as legal advisor left the secretariat at the beginning of April to work for the EU unit in the administration of the Hamburg senate.
- 1.6.4. Mrs Agnès Paillard, former secretary, devoted time and energy on a voluntary basis to support the administration of COMECE. The secretary general also received expertise by Dr. Hans Wendtner.

- 1.6.5 The secretariat was assisted in the course of the year by voluntary interns: Veronika Kolkova (SK / 08.01 – 09.02) ; Gesa Scheftel (D / Pupil /22-26.01) ; Markus Merk (D / 12.02 – 30.03) ; Angela Lixfeld (D / 04.07 - 03.10) ; Anne Sponholz (D / 01.10 – 30.11)

## 1.7 COMMISSIONS AND WORKING GROUPS

- 1.7.1 The **Commission for Legal Affairs** held meeting on 18 January 2007.

The first session was dedicated to an exchange of information concerning legal issues of importance to the Church in the EU member states. During the second session Mr Paul Cullan from DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, presented the Green Paper on the “Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century” [COM (2006) 708 final]. Mr. Cullan explained that the Green Paper pays special attention to the proper implementation of employment directives, to the notion of “employee”, to the problems concerning “outsiders” and “insiders” as reported by Wim Kok in 2003, to the phenomenon of the self employment as well as to the consequences of mobility. Mr Cullan underlined that the field of labour law, due to diverse problems and challenges, has become an arena of the defence of national interests. According to Mr Cullan a harmonisation of labour law within the EU is neither possible nor desirable. The Green Paper however has launched a public consultation which, on the basis of the contribution to this consultation, will lead to community action in autumn 2007. The questions raised by the members of the Legal Affairs Commission in the following discussion concerned mainly the competences of the EU in the field of labour law. It was underlined that the genuine occupational competences do not and cannot imply the difference in treatment as regards the antidiscrimination directives. Prof. Eckert suggested that employers should establish rules of fair employment which allow their employees for a greater flexibility.

As regards the role of the family and children’s rights the Communication from the European Commission of 4 July 2006 “Towards an EU strategy on the Rights of the Child” [COM (2006)367] and the paper “Investing in Youth: from childhood to adulthood” published by the Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA) were presented. Through the Communication, the European Commission intends to ensure that all internal and external EU policies respect children’s rights. Members of the Commission estimated that the Strategy strongly promotes the children’s need to express their views in decisions affecting their lives. Such a strong emphasis puts into question the boundaries of the parents’ rights. The Commission’s Strategy tends to separate the child from its family. The same tendency can be found in the paper “Investing in Youth: from childhood to adulthood”. It was underlined that the Strategy should acknowledge the important role of the family, and in particular the role of parents. However, finding consensus on the concept of “family” seems to a difficult task. Furthermore it was highlighted that certain rights have an exclusive or particular relevance for children. Nevertheless, children’s rights are neither opposed nor different to human rights and should therefore not be separated from human rights.

The Commission members received an updated on new developments concerning the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights EU and the European Institute for Gender Equality.

Mr. Guillaume Durand from the European Policy Centre presented an analysis of the constitutional debate in view of the German Presidency. Mr Durand also mentioned a study presented by the Bertelsmann Foundation which shows how central elements of the Constitutional Treaty may be transferred to the existing treaties. He pointed out that it was

practically impossible to make any realistic forecasts concerning the future of the negotiation and ratification process, although from the legal (not political) point of view it would be possible to achieve the adoption of the Treaty before the with the next parliamentary elections will take place. Most certainly the debates and controversies concerning the reference to Christianity in the Preamble and the Charter or Fundamental Rights would prolong the negotiation process and make it more difficult. Mr. Durand also presented his views on the possibility of reducing the Treaty only to part I and II and submitting part III to further negotiations, concluding that there is an inseparable bond between the parts.

Ms. Ursula Hillbrand from the Secretariat General of the European Commission presented the Working Plan and the priorities of the Commission for 2007. She briefly pictured the process of strategic planning in the Commission and explained that the Commission was concerned with drafting the Annual Policy Strategy for 2008. Ms. Hillbrand drew the attention to the diversity of the priorities: in the Annual Plan there are 21 strategic initiatives (unchangeable and strictly defined in time), 60 Priority Initiatives (they are not precisely planned in time) and some 800 points of less importance which are gathered in the so called "catalogue". She also underlined that the current planning process is much more simplified and transparent, compared to the previous practise.

#### 1.7.2 Issues in EU **Social Policy** were the focus for two meeting during the course of the year.

A meeting of secretaries of Social Affairs commissions took place on 11 January. It served to update participants on activities in their respective commissions and give an overview on current challenges concerning European social and economic policies. The COMECE Social Affairs Commission met on Tuesday, 22 May 2007 in the Catholic Academy in Berlin. The bishops and experts, who are member of this commission met firstly with Mr Franz Müntefering, the vice-chancellor and federal minister for employment and social affairs. Mr. Müntefering gave a speech on the "European Social Model from the perspective of the German Presidency of the European Union. In the second part of the meeting Mr Roger Liddle addressed the Social Affairs Commission. Mr. Liddle wrote a report for the European Commission on "Europe's social reality" and organised a consultation on the issue to which the COMECE secretariat responded in 2008 on the basis of remarks by the members of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission during their encounter with Mr. Liddle. The meeting also allowed for an exchange on priorities in the socio-ethical work of bishops' conferences.

#### 1.7.3. The Spring session of the **Bioethics Reflection Group took place on 1 March 2007**. The following members of the group participated in the meeting: Soeur P. Nunez-Cubero (Spain), Prof. A. Autiero (Münster), Prof. M. Beck, Prof. S. Marcus-Helmons (Brussels), Father P. Verspieren SJ (Paris), Mgr. Noel Treanor and Mrs Katharina Schauer. Prof. M. Dupuis (Brussels) was excused.

Firstly, the group exchanged about the bioethical issues at stake at national and at EU level (FR: euthanasia, revision of the bioethics law, preimplantation diagnosis and the President of the Ethics Council speaking of "eugenics" in this context; DE: Preimplantation Diagnosis; BE: statistics on euthanasia, new consultation group on human rights; EU: launch of the 7<sup>th</sup> Research Framework Programme, debate on a new Regulation on advanced therapies).

The central topic of the meeting was « **The creation of human-animal mixtures (hybrids and chimera)** » in order to elaborate an opinion on the anthropological and ethical questions

involved. The theme was chosen in view of current requests of two research teams for licences in the UK to produce an embryo by introducing a human cell nucleus (thus human DNA) into an animal (enucleated) egg cell. The resulting embryo would have ~99% human genetic information and ~1% animal genetic information due to the mitochondria of the egg cell. These embryos (so-called cybrids) should be used to create embryonic stem cell lines in order to do further research on those. As animal egg cells are easier available for researchers, it would make research easier. However, there are not only ethical and anthropological concerns, but also scientific doubts about the usefulness of such research.

The group discussed the question from a larger angle, looking both at chimera (different genome in different parts of the body – for example due to xenotransplantation) and at hybrids (mixed genome in all parts of the body) and the anthropological and ethical concerns. They emphasised that the diversity of research activities require a nuanced approach, including not only ethical and anthropological but also scientific expertise and honesty. They strongly opposed attempts to blur the species barrier.

In the follow-up to the meeting an opinion of the group was elaborated. The opinion was presented to the COMECE bishops during the autumn plenary session; it is available on the COMECE website and was made available to individuals in the European Commission.

**The autumn session of the Bioethics Reflection Group took place on 11 October 2007.**

The following members of the group participated in the meeting: Soeur P. Nunez-Cubero (Spain), Prof. A. Autiero (Münster), Prof. S. Marcus-Helmons (Brussels), Father P. Verspieren SJ (Paris), Mgr. Noel Treanor and Mrs Katharina Schauer. Prof. M. Kopp (Hungary) and Mr Bernard Farrell-Roberts (UK) participated as guests. Prof. M. Beck and Prof. M. Dupuis (Brussels) were excused.

Firstly, the group exchanged about the bioethical issues at stake at national and at EU level (EU: Consultation on the European Research Area; proposal of a “code of conduct” for nanotechnology research to be elaborated by the European Commission; opinion of the EGE on the ethical review under the 7<sup>th</sup> Research Framework Programme for research involving human embryonic stem cells).

The meeting was dedicated to the **Ethical implications organ donation and transplantation**, an issue triggered by a Communication of the European Commission on “Organ donation and transplantation – Policy actions at EU level”.

Mrs Schauer presented the Communication of the European Commission and Father Verspieren elaborated on the position of the Church regarding organ donation. Then the group debated a) the issue of organ donation as well as b) the proposals issued by the European Commission. They highlighted that the Catholic Church had been very supportive of organ donation from the very beginning of its development (speech of Pope Pie XII in 1956), outlining the possibility of organ donation as a gift out of solidarity and love, and yet emphasising need for informed consent and for respectful treatment of the body.

All in all, the group took a supportive stance towards the document and the proposals of the European Commission. The Catholic Church should continue to make her contribution for the benefit of patients waiting for organ transplantation. At the same time they underlined that organ donation may never be treated as an economic transaction, thus criticising the economic language used in the communication of the European Commission. Furthermore they insisted on thorough scrutiny of the criteria for brain death, on the need for valid consent either by the donor or by their families (in the case of deceased donors). They called for proper and comprehensive information and education of the public and for transparent and just allocation procedures.

The opinion of the group will be made available on the website of COMECE and will be presented to the bishops of COMECE as well as to MEPs and to civil servants of the European Commission.

- 1.7.4. The **Working Group on Information Society, Communications and Media Policy** continued to monitor policy in its fields of responsibility. Its core members - Johanna Touzel, Michel Kuhn, Jim Mc Donnell and P. Gabriel Nissim o.p. )

On 5 -6 February 2007, the Working Group organised a Seminar on « *The New Broadcasting Environment: A Challenge for the Church in Europe*» in Brussels, in which Communication Officers of 13 Bishops' conferences of the EU participated, together with a representative of CCEE. Speakers were civil servants from the European Commission, a representative of the European Consumer's Organisation (BEUC), journalists (ZDF, ORF, France 2, Agence SIR-Europa), academics (Leuven University), professionals from the audiovisual sector (RTBF).

**Technical Framework:** The Seminar started from the observation that across Europe the role and place of broadcasters in society is under question. New technologies, the Internet in particular are changing the whole media landscape. At the same time increasing market competition and concerns about editorial independence, concentration of ownership and public accountability and standards are reshaping the business of TV and radio.

**Legislative Context:**

- The Council of Europe had recently called for a renewed commitment to public service broadcasting.
- In an attempt to adapt European regulation of broadcasting to these new realities the European Commission, Council and Parliament revised the current Directive on Television without Frontiers to create a new framework which will become an Audio Visual Services Directive.

**Main issues of the seminar :** How can and should the Church rethink its relationship with public and commercial broadcasters? What can the Church contribute to helping broadcasters in developing adequate ethical responses to the challenges of operating in this new media environment? How can the Church respond to the challenges posed by the Internet and new media? What are the implications of these pressures and changes for Church actions and policy interventions at European and at national level?

**Goal of the Seminar :** to give an opportunity for European Church leaders and advisers to begin to reflect upon these issues, to share experiences and to identify some possible strategic responses.

**Conclusions:** The diversity of collaboration models between Church and Public broadcasters (e.g. France, The Netherlands) was noted, as well as the development by Catholic Church of private channels in recent years in Europe. The participants in the Seminar concluded that it was necessary for the Church to maintain Religious programmes on Public channels, while developing its own broadcasting channels (private radio and TV). They also expressed the wish to have common production of religious programmes jointly developed by several countries, so as to overcome the obstacle of heavy production costs.

- 1.7.5. The **COMECE Working Group on Migration and Asylum** brought together specialists from the Bishops' Conferences and representatives from Brussels-based Catholic organisations

working on migration and asylum. The Working Group met on 26 February and 17 October 2007. The first meeting of the year took place on 26 February 2007. In the first session Mrs Sandra Pratt, DG Justice, Freedom and Security, informed the members of the working group about current initiatives in integration and migration policy. She stressed the importance for the Commission of a two-way approach to integration (steps to be taken both by migrants and societies) and the fact that the current policy priority is to ensure the implementation of the Common Basic Principles at the national level. The relevance of intercultural dialogue was also highlighted by Mrs. Pratt, who added that interreligious dialogue, as a part thereof, shall remain in the responsibility of the Churches; Mrs. Pratt outlined the possibility of having some projects in the field funded by the EU. New initiatives in the field of migration policy were also described (with regard to seasonal and highly skilled workers, migrant workers' rights). The members of the working group underlined the importance of focusing on the link between migration and development as well as on the media's influence on people's perception of migration. Support for the creation of an European Forum was voiced by the members of the Working Group: Mrs Pratt announced that further details about this were to be discussed at the Potsdam Conference. In the following session, Dr. Alice Fiser, Assistant of Manfred Weber, MEP, informed the Working Group about the ongoing discussion within the European Parliament on the *Draft Directive on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals*. She described the difficulties encountered in reaching a compromise in the Parliament: the basis' of the said compromise were to be found in the primacy of voluntary return, the re-entry ban (valid within all Member States), the strict separation of detained migrants from prisoners, the creation of an Ombudsman, a clear definition of transit zones and the possibility for NGO's and Churches of being present during return operations. The significance of access to detainees by Church representatives for spiritual counselling was underlined (their recognition as NGO representatives was considered insufficient). A short discussion about the preparation for the "Global Forum" followed: it was underlined that the "Day of Civil Society", which was to take place the day before the above-said Forum had to see national NGO's as members of government delegations. The following session saw Mrs Cláudia Faria, JHA Counsellor at the Permanent Representation of Portugal, presenting the priorities of the forthcoming EU Presidency. First of all she mentioned the enlargement of the Schengen area, legal migration and the external dimension of migration (focus on Africa: EU-Africa-Summit and EUROMED ministerial meeting). As for the asylum field, she reported about the focus to be put on the implementation of first phase measures and on the Commission's proposal for a directive aimed at extending to refugees the possibility to obtain long-term residence status. The return directive was indicated as an important priority and as an instrument of migration management favoured by the forthcoming Presidency, while the necessity of having a reform of the Dublin II regulation was stressed. Mrs. Faria referred to the possibility of having the Protected Entry Procedure (PEP) be rediscussed under the Portuguese Presidency and also mentioned the evaluation of the work of FRONTEX, with a possible enlargement of its powers and resources. This presentation was followed by an assessment of the first phase instruments for a Common European Asylum System: the structure of the Green Paper devoted to the same subject (in course of preparation), was also highlighted, and reference was made to some UNHCR initiatives in the field in question. The meeting was closed by a presentation held by Mrs. Doris Peschke (CCME) who reported about the preparation of the Forum on Migration to be held at the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu (Romania), 4-9 September 2007: the forum would focus on global migration and its meaning for the Churches in Europe and inform non-experts about what Church experts do in the migration field. The next meeting took place on 17 October 2007. During the first session, Mr Kristof Tamas, DG Justice, Freedom, and Security, held a presentation about circular migration and temporary migration: during the ensuing debate the members of the Working

Group underlined that integration should not be excluded from the initiative and expressed support for a more proper effort to change the negative perception of migration and for an incentive-based approach to favour the circularity of migration. In the following session, Fr Stephane Joulain of the French Bishops' Conference informed the members of the Working Group about the latest developments in migration reforms in France, in particular with regard to DNA testing in relation with family reunifications. The session evolved in a discussion, which led to the idea of launching, during the course of 2008, a series of short papers to be addressed to the various Bishops' Conferences, centred on those migration issues which raise ethical concerns. In the following session, Mr Philip Amaral (JRS) held a presentation on the state of play concerning the return directive. Main points: the text, in its current state, presents some positive and some negative aspects (especially with regard to the maximum length of administrative detention and to the provision concerning the re-entry ban) and more contacts with the EU Institutions are needed, to try and improve the proposal, despite the difficulties. In the subsequent presentation, Maltese MEP Simon Busuttil informed the members of the Working Group on Malta's situation with regard to the huge influx of migrants the little island is subject to: the need for instruments that foster a better and more effective burden sharing, encouraging legal migration was especially highlighted. In the following session, Mrs Jerneja Savernik, JHA Counsellor at the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Slovenia to the EU, presented the priorities of the forthcoming Slovenian Presidency in the field of migration and asylum. She highlighted that the focus will be on illegal migration (directive on the return of illegally staying migrants, directive providing for sanctions against employers of illegally staying third country nationals) but that important actions will also concern asylum (Common European Asylum System) and legal migration (circular migration, "blue card" for highly skilled workers, single application procedure for a single permit to reside and work in the territory of a Member State, extension of the Global Approach to Migration). In the last part of the meeting two short presentations were held: the first, by Mr Peter Verhaeghe of Caritas Europa, who informed the Working Group about the proposal for a Council Decision establishing a European Migration Network, underlining the fact that the initiative is to be welcome despite some concerns (role of the European Commission, lack of involvement of civil society in the Steering Board); the second one by Mr Alessandro Calcagno of the COMECE Secretariat, who briefly presented the contents of the response to the Green Paper on the Common European Asylum System drafted by a group of Christian organisations based in Brussels which deal with migration issues. The numerous specific observations contained in the document can be summarised in two goals: request for a lesser degree of discretion for the Member States and higher standards of protection.

- 1.7.6. In the area of inter-religious and international affairs the COMECE intensified its activities during 2007. Two main projects have been set up in 2007 with a view to Year 2008 – "European year of Intercultural Dialogue". The first concerned a project of European interfaith (Christian-Muslim-Jewish) encounter. A working document has been written for that purpose, as well as a project of seminar. Secondly, preparations went under way for a project of four seminars on questions related to Islam in Europe as well as Christian-Muslim reciprocity in religious freedom. In co-operation with the CEC-KEK and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung a request was addressed to the European Parliament in order to organise these seminars (in April, May, June and September 2008) in its premises. Further inputs concerned the issue of Christian-Muslim reciprocity in religious freedom. Several exchanges have been held on this issue with a number of EU politicians and civil servants who could have an input in that regard at the EU level, namely in the framework of the EuroMed Partnership and the relations between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In this area of work a contribution to *the consultative process of*

*the Council of Europe on the White Paper on the intercultural dialogue can be noted as well as a contribution of the COMECE Secretariat to the joint consultative advice of the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL) – Religions for Peace (of which the secretary general is a member). Mr Vincent Legrand, member of the COMECE Staff and in charge of this work area took part as a member of the Catholic Delegation invited for the consultative advice of religious representatives on the White Paper by the Council of Europe in San Marino, 23-24 April 2007 (participation in the debates and in the writing of the resolutions of the consultation under the direction of Father Bruno Mazas, head of the delegation).*

1.7.7 The **Administrative and Financial infrastructure** of the COMECE were cared for through a group of financial experts which met on 26 October 2007.

1.7.8. In preparing and carrying forward the agendas of the Working Groups, the secretaries and staff of the secretariat maintained contact with other Church-linked offices in Brussels, especially with CARITAS, CIDSE, ESPACES, OCIPE, Justice and Peace, Pax Christi International. They kept close contact with offices of the other Churches working in the same policy areas. They also exchanged information with the officials of the EU institutions and with relevant policy centres and think-tanks.

## **2 COMECE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION**

### **2.1 Encounter and Witness**

2.1.1. The Plenary meetings involved direct exchange between the Bishops members of COMECE and officials of the EU institutions. In the course of the year further contacts with European civil servants were made by the President, the Executive committee and by members of the secretariat and on occasion by members of the Working Groups. The COMECE secretariat was contacted on occasion by officials of the institutions, by Members of the European Parliament and by persons working for European agencies and organisations to discuss the Church's view or input on EU policy matters.

2.1.2. In view of the imminent fiftieth anniversary of the treaties of Rome, COMECE organised with the gracious support of the Italian bishops' conference a European Congress entitled "Values and Perspectives for Europe. It was held from 23 to 25 March in Rome. Over 500 participants, among them many young people and also representatives of other Christian denominations, coming nearly all EU member states attended. In the preparation of the Congress a "comité de Sages" under the presidency of the former EU commissioner Marcelino Oreja drafted a report that was presented by its secretaries Philippe de Schoutheete and Stephen Wall at the beginning of the Congress. Further members of the Comité de Sages commented on the document. The Congress was opened by COMECE president Adrianus van Luyn. The president of the new Italian bishops' conference archbishop Angelo Bagnasco, the vice-president of the European Commission Mr. Franco Frattini, the German minister Wolfgang Schäuble and Mr. Luca Jahier for the Christian network IXE also addressed the audience at this first session. Before lunchtime of the first day a first draft for a message to European Council in Berlin was read out to which participants could table amendments.

After lunch Prof. Hans Gert Pöttering, the President of the European Parliament, spoke to the Congress. The following eminent Europeans participated in the subsequent working session:

Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, the secretary of the Holy See for the Relations with the States; Prof Mario Monti, former EU Commissioner; Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, Pastor Jean-Arnold de Clermont, the President of the Conference of European Churches and Sr Enrica Roanna, the Under-secretary of the Pontifical Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated and Sacred Life. This session was presided over by the Dominican Father and Director of Espaces Ignace Berten. The key note speech of the first day was given Mrs Mary McAleese, the President of Ireland. In the evening the participants of the Congress were welcomed by the St. Egidio Community in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere for Vespers and in their headquarters at the piazza St. Egidio for a reception.

On the morning of the second day Pope Benedict XVI received the participants of the Congress and addressed them in a speech. On the return to the Congress Center the "Message of Rome" was proclaimed by Mr Stephen Wall and presented to Romano Prodi, the Italian President of the Council of ministers, who took this message with them to the European Council that started on the same afternoon in Berlin. The afternoon session dealt with "Perspectives for the European Union". Under the chairmanship of Bishop Piotr Jarecki, auxiliary bishop of Warsaw and Vice-President of COMECE the following personalities were invited for a statement/ Prof Manuela Silva, Sr. Madeleine Fredell op, Mr Vyautas Landsbergis, Mr Erwin Teufel, Mr Jan Kulakowski. During the second afternoon session, chaired by Mr Neven Simac, statements were given by Mrs Magdalena Bussmann, Prof Lorenzo Ornaghi and Mr. Peter Sutherland. Finally, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin and Vice-President of COMECE gave a summary of the day's proceedings. The second very rich day of the Congress was concluded by the celebration of Vespers at the Basilica San Lorenzo al Verano and a prayer at the tomb of Alcide De Gasperi. On Sunday, the 25<sup>th</sup> of March the participants of the Congress concelebrated/attended mass at St Peter's Basilica and prayed the Angelus with His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

- 2.1.3 Germany and Portugal held the Presidency of the EU in 2007. A meeting took place on 15 January 2007 in Berlin with the German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier. On that occasion the members of the delegation representing the Churches were : Mgr Noel Treanor, Secretary General of COMECE; Rev Rüdiger Noll, Director of the Church and Society Commission and Associate General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches; Oberkirchenrätin Antje Heider-Rottwilm, Moderator of Church and Society Commission and Head of the Europe Department of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD); Oberkirchenrat David Gill, Deputy to the Plenipotentiary of the EKD; Oberkirchenrätin Sabine von Zanthier from the EKD Office in Brussels; Mr Heiner B. Lendermann, Deputy to the Plenipotentiary of the German Bishops' Conference and Dr Martina Köppen, from the Plenipotentiary's office of the German Bishops' Conference. Among the issues discussed with them were the following: ....

Portugal assumed the Presidency on 1 July. Exceptionally no particular meeting with COMECE CSC-CEC took place. However the Plenary Assembly of CCEE met with the Portuguese Prime Minister Socrates in early October. President and Secretary General of COMECE were involved in this encounter and several EU-related issues were addressed.

- 2.1.4. The staff of the secretariat maintained and developed contacts with the EU institutions as they carried out the mission assigned to COMECE. In particular they were in constant contact with the European Commission, its cabinets and Directorates General, with staff and members of the European Parliament and with services of the Council of Ministers. The COMECE press officer followed the daily Press Conferences at the European Commission. COMECE documents were submitted to appropriate officials and services. Throughout the year numerous

officials of the EU institutions visited the secretariat for discussions, briefing sessions and to address visiting groups as well as COMECE Commissions and Working Groups.

- 2.1.5. Close working relations were maintained with the Group of Political Advisers (BEPA) to the President of the European Commission and in particular with Dr. Michael Weninger, the official responsible for relations with the Churches. In the course of the year Dr. Weninger was replaced by Mr Jorge Cesar das Neves, a diplomat of Portuguese origin who formerly worked in the European Council.
- 2.1.6. Staff members took part in the Briefing sessions organised by the Bureau of Political Advisers (BEPA) for the Church-linked offices in Brussels after the meetings of the European Council.
- 2.1.7. The staff of the secretariat liaised with officials of the Permanent Representations of the Member States and the Missions of the candidate countries. Officials of various Representations addressed meetings of the COMECE Working Groups and attended other meetings at the secretariat.
- 2.1.8. Contacts were maintained with offices representing the regions of the Member States. Staff members participated in breakfast meetings, seminars and consultations organised by policy centres, in particular by the European Policy Centre (EPC) and by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS).

## **2.2. INPUT TO THE EUROPEAN UNION**

- 2.2.1. A Meeting with the German Presidency took place in January. (see above under 2.1.3)
- 2.2.2. A "Comité de Sages" addressed a **report** entitled "A Europe of Values. The ethical dimension of the European Union" to the bishops of COMECE". It was published on the occasion of the European Congress organised in March in Rome. The report consists of nine chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion. Among others they deal with "Peace and Freedom", "Power and responsibility", "diversity, subsidiarity and differentiation" and "Solidarity" both within the EU and with the world. The president of the Committee was the former EU Commissioner Marcelino Oreja, its secretaries Mr Philippe de Schoutheete and Mr Stephen Wall. The report was translated in several European languages.
- 2.2.3. The European Congress in Rome produced a **message** to the European Council, who met for an extraordinary session on 25 March in Berlin. The message was received by the Italian prime minister Romano Prodi who was asked to transmit it to his colleagues in the European Council. The message stated in its first paragraph the following sentences: "We consider it to be our duty to carry on the work of European construction, bearing in mind that it is a century long-task. It took our forebears more than a hundred years to build a new cathedral for just a few people. In fifty years we have built a new "cathedral" for all Europeans."
- 2.2.4. The secretariat published at the end of June a statement on the outcome of the European Council in June which had given a clear and very detailed mandate to another Intergovernmental Conference in order to resolve the European institutional crises. It was noted with satisfaction that the article on the status of Churches and religious communities had been inserted into the proposed Treaty on the functioning of the Union. The contents of the statement was agreed with the members of the Executive Committee.

- 2.2.5. To the end of the year the secretariat published with the permission of the bishops of COMECE several language versions of the proposal for a EU strategy to support family and marriage.
- 2.2.6. In accordance with long-established practice, the Bureau of European Policy Advisors (BEPA) of the European Commission, the Secretariat of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) and the Church & Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC/CEC) has co-organised a **Dialogue Seminar**. However, in 2007 no Dialogue Seminar could be organised due to the change of staff at the BEPA.
- 2.2.7. Members of the secretariat attended **Hearings** at the European Commission and at the European Parliament on subjects pertaining to EU policy. Likewise they attended meetings of EP Committees dealing with draft policy issues being monitored by the secretariat.
- 2.2.8. Bishops conferences were advised of European Commission **consultations** on policy initiatives and encouraged to participate. For its part the COMECE secretariat prepared and submitted responses to consultations, e.g. : the Community action on Health Services (SEC 2006, 1195), the Communication of the Commission on social services of general interest (2006, 177), the Commission Green paper on the Future of Common European Asylum System (COM 2007, 301 final) ; on "European Research Area: New Perspectives" (COM 2007, 161 final). A written contribution was also send to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in respect to a consultation with civil society on a strategy for cooperation.
- 2.2.9. In the past years the COMECE secretariat published an annual **Global Governance Assessment**. Due to the high work amount in other areas no Assessment was published in 2007. However based on a decision of the Plenary Assembly an expert group for **EU policy on Climate change an Christian life style** was nominated during the second half of the year, which held a first meeting in early 2008. The former EU commissioner Dr Franz Fischler accepted the chairmanship of this group.
- 2.2.10. Numerous contributions, both oral and written, were made to EU policy debates, as indicated in the sections of this report presenting the Plenary meetings, where the Bishops discussed with EU personnel and in section 1.6 outlining the work carried out by the Commissions and Working Groups.
- 2.2.11. At the request of the Holy See Delegation to the Council of Europe the COMECE secretariat monitored developments at the Parliamentary Assembly. The secretariat informed the services of the Bishops' conference regarding development in regard to both and encouraged appropriate intervention.

### 3. **PROMOTING DEBATE BETWEEN CHURCH, OFFICIALS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND SOCIETY**

- 3.1. Throughout the year the secretariat continued its tradition of inviting officials of the EU institutions, Members of the European Parliament and persons engaged in the process of European integration to working breakfasts and lunches to discuss EU policy issues pertinent to COMECE's concerns.
- 3.2. As in previous years and at the request of the Group of the European Peoples' Party in the European Parliament, once a month the COMECE secretariat received a group of *stagiaires/interns* from the Christian Democratic movements in central and eastern European

countries. During these meetings these young men and women, many of them likely to become future civil servants and politicians in their respective countries, are briefed on COMECE's work and on the Church's engagement in the process of European construction.

- 3.3. Staff members maintained and developed contacts with think-tanks, political foundations and offices working on EU issues. They also took part in several seminars organised by think-tanks and foundations.
- 3.4. As in 2005 and 2006 the secretariat prepared an Information and Visit programme to the EU institutions for the "Westminster Catholic Parliamentary Intern programme". In 2007 they visited Brussels on 8-10 Mai. After an introductory presentation on the EU and the work of COMECE, they visited the UK Permanent Representation where they were briefed on its work. Further visits to the European Commission and to the European Parliament introduced them to the EU decision-making process and the work of the respective institutions. In the discussions with civil servants and Members of the Parliament they had an opportunity to explore particular policy dossiers. They also visited and met with other Brussels based Church organisations: the Jesuit office OCIFE, the Jesuit Refugee Service, Caritas Europa, and the Evangelical initiative, Care for Europe. The Apostolic Nuncio to the European Communities, H. E. Mons. André Dupuy, received the group and briefed them on the work of the Apostolic Nunciature.
- 3.5. A part from one evening lecture organised during the Plenary Assembly (see below 4.3) one reception was organised the Proposal for a Strategy of the EU to promote the family and marriage. This event was co-hosted with the European network of Catholic family organisations (FAFCE).

#### **4. INFORMATION SERVICE, PUBLICATIONS, LECTURES**

- 4.1. The monthly review, *Europe-Infos*, produced in co-operation with the Jesuit Office OCIFE, was published monthly in French, English, German, and Polish. An editorial board made up of members of the COMECE and OCIFE secretariats and of EU civil servants met monthly to plan the forthcoming issues. The review was distributed to all Bishops in the Member States of the European Union, to the services of Bishops' Conferences and to subscribers. Editorials and articles are sometimes reproduced in national publications (SIR in Italy) and by Church organisations.
- 4.2. The analyses and reports of the COMECE Working Groups were sent to the appropriate services of the Bishops Conferences. Circular letters were sent to the Bishops members and to the secretariats of the Bishops' Conferences in regard to draft EU policy. The latter referred to : (i) a proposal for a regulation concerning innovative therapies (letters of 9 January and 18 April ; (ii) a green book on the modernisation of labor law (21 February); (iii) a European Council regulation concerning the creation of Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union (8 March); (iv) a consultation on research policy in the EU (29 June); a green book on a future common European asylum system (19 July); a consultation on schools for the XXI century (28 September); a Council of Europe resolution on the "dangers of creationism in education (26 September and 5 November).
- 4.3. In the course of an open evening debate, Mr Otmar Oehring (Missio/Aachen), Mrs Jana Hybaskova MEP and Mrs Angela Martini from the European Commission informed about the Iraqi Refugee crisis and possible EU action. Approximately one hundred participants assisted to

this lecture which was organised on 21 November in the course of the autumn plenary session of COMECE.

- 4.4. Articles were written by staff members for the monthly review. Staff members published articles in reviews, publications and in newspapers in various countries. Lectures were given on the work of COMECE and on issues pertaining to EU policy, at conferences organised by Bishops' Conferences, universities and academic institutes.
- 4.5. In response to invitations and as their responsibilities in Brussels permitted, staff members took part in and addressed congresses seminars and study events in Brussels and throughout Europe. The following list reflects some of the work in this field of the secretariat's activity: participation in a conference on "Men and Gender Equality in Europe" organised by the International European Movement (Brussels 25 January), Participation in a conference "stemcell research – hope or hype" organised by the European Greens (Brussels, 31 January); participation in the EPRID seminar on "EU and religious discrimination" (Brussels 8 February), participation in the 4th meeting of the European Council of Religious Leaders – Religion for Peace (ECRL) (Birmingham, 12-14 February); statement at the meeting of the European Expert's Group of the German bishops' conference (Brussels, 16 February), participation in a debate at the European Parliament on the raft regulation on advanced therapies (Brussels; 26 February); participation in the meeting of the German section of the European Society for Theology (Berlin, 7-9 March); participation a conference on economical aspects of irregular migration (Berlin, 14-16 mars), lecture in the course of the meeting of the working group on Europe of the German bishops' conference (Brussels, 16 March); participation in the European Voice conference "Healthcare 2007 (Brussels 19 – 20 March); participation in the joint bioethics Committee meeting (Belfast, 20-21 March); statement at the EPP seminar " Interfaith dialogue in cities and regions of Europe" (Brussels, 22 March); participation in the seminar "Should there be an EU Freedom of Information Act" organised by the European Citizen Action Service (Brussels 19 April); contribution as a member of the Catholic Delegation invited for the consultative advice of religious representatives on the White Paper by the Council of Europe (San Marino, 23-24 April); participation in the High-Level Education Event « Keeping our Promises on Education » organised by the European Commission (Brussels, 2 May); statement on a panel at a seminar on "The role of the new generation in finding peace and promoting dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians", Italian Jewish Youth / Italian Muslim Youth (Brussels, 2 May); participation in a seminar on "Social Europe: Challenge, risk and the role of faith based NGOs, co-organised by BEPAZ and Eurodiaconia (Brussels 8 May); participation in the presentation of the report 'Evolution of the family in Europe in 2007" (Brussels, 9 May); statement at the occasion of the Conference organised for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of OCIFE (Brussels, 9 May); participation in a FFCE conference « Chance for families in Europe (Berlin, 14 May); participation and statement at the International conference on "Values and Politics" organised by the Robert Schuman Foundation (Vilnius, 10 – 12 May); participation in the meeting of the « Cellule Europe" of the French bishops' conference (Paris, 16 May and 30 October); Statement during at the meeting of the Brussels Club (Catholic Youth and Education movements) (Brussels, 5 June); Speech at the General Assembly of the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (Brussels, 24 May); Participation in a conference "Religious minorities as cornerstone of Europe" organised by the ALDE group at the European Parliament (Brussels 5 June); Participation in a religious leader's meeting with the German Interior Minister Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble (Berlin, 7 June); participation in an international conference on « Europe and the Arab World » at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (Brussels, 7 June); presentation in a seminar on Religion and the EU for Palestinian representatives organized by the Friedrich-Naumann Foundation (Brussels, 14 June); (participation in a panel debate at the 7<sup>th</sup> Gniezno Convention "Man – the Way for Europe – How to make the World

more human" (Gniezno, 15-17 June); participation in a panel debate at a European meeting of University professors (Rome, 24 June); lecture at the summer school of the Catholic Education service of the diocese of Münster (Münster, 26 June); participation in LIBE committee seminar on "Prevention of statelessness" (Brussels, 26 June); participation in a conference -"Moving towards an International Peace Conference for the Middle East" organized by the PSE Group of the European Parliament (Brussels 2-3 July); participation in EU commission conference on "2007 European year of equal opportunities" (Brussels, 4-5 July); participation in a seminar at the Cardiff Centre for Law and Religion (Cardiff, 9 July); participation in the ALDE hearing on euthanasia (Brussels, 5 July); participation in the informal European bioethics meeting (Steiermark, 6-9 September); participation in the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Congress « Politics without religion ? » organised by the International Institute for Canon Law (Lugano, 9-11 September); Lecture at the 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of the European Society of Theology « Religion and the European Project – Theological perspectives (Leuven, 13 – 16 September); organisation of a visit of Bishop Timmerevers (Vechta/Münster) and his staff in Brussels (17 – 19 September); Lecture for Catholic women from Löningen/Gemany (Brussels, 18 September), Lecture for the Gilde Frankfurt (Brussels 18 September); participation in the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Pontifical Academy in Cracow "From the Treaties of Rome to the Constitutional Treaty – The role of the Catholic Church in the Process of the European Integration » (Cracow, 14-15 September), participation and report on current EU policy priorities in a meeting of the "Network Christians for Europe" (IXE) (Zagreb 14 – 16 September), participation in the launching of "Tomorrow's Europe" organised by 'Notre Europe' (Brussels, 17 September); participation in the family policy Congress of ECPM (Brussels, 21 September); lecture at the XIV<sup>ème</sup> Colloque of the European Conference of Christian Radios (Brussels, 26 – 28 September); lecture at a seminar organised by the Kommende Dortmund (Rome, 1 – 2 October); participation in a workshop organised by the Presidency of the Council on "Mediation in Family matters" (Brussels 4 October); statement at the EU-China Forum organised by CSC/CEC (Brussels, 4 October); participation in a consultative meeting with the representatives of civil society organisations concerning a EP report on the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (Brussels, 18 October); speech at meeting of the social commission of the German bishops' conference (Berlin, 19 October); participation in the Italian Social Weeks (Pisa, 18 – 21 October); statement at a podium debate at a Conference organised by the Whyndam Place Charlemagne Trust (Salisbury, 20 – 21 October); Participation in a conference "50 years of EU gender equality law" organised by the European Commission (Brussels, 25-26 October); participation in a seminar on "Religion and Violence" organised by the Protestant Church of Brussels (Brussels, 1 November); participation in a workshop « Europe – Moyen-Orient » organised by Pax Christi (Brussels 5-6 November); participation in the symposium "New Atheism – A threat to Western Civilisation" organised by the World Youth Alliance Europe and the Hans-Seidel Foundation (Brussels, 7 November 2007); participation in the ALDE Seminar « Free Movement of legal professions within the EU » (Brussels, 8 November 2007); participation in the briefing "The Lisbon Treaty and the Protection of Fundamental Rights" organised by the European Academy of Law (ERA) (Brussels, 12 November); participation in a colloquia "What Islam for today ? " (Maredsous, 17 November ) ; participation in the European Food Safety Authority Conference "From Safe Food to Healthy Diets" (Brussels, 20-21 November); participation in a working lunch "Supporting Islamic democratic forces in South-East Asia" hosted by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Brussels, 21 November); participation in the conference « The three C'S for the European Elections – a dialogue between Civil Society organizations and MEPs » in the European Parliament (Brussels, 27 November 2007), participation in the seminary « DO Muslim Schools threaten the school pact? » at the Université Catholique de Louvain ( 27 November); participation in the STOA Annual Lecture « The Future of the brain » (Brussels, 27 November 2007), participation in the EPC breakfast « Priorities of the Slovenian Presidency (Brussels, 28

November); Participation in a conference organised by the World Youth Alliance Europe on « Man : A spiritual being » (Brussels, 28 November); participation in a seminar on “Good Bioethical Practise (Brussels, 4 December); participation in the Consultative Conference on the setting up of the Fundamental Rights Platform organised by the European Fundamental Rights Agency (10 – 11 December), participation in the conference « The State of the EU : A perspective from the outside » organised by the World Jewish Congress (Brussels, 11 December), participation in the EuroStemCell Conference “At the Cutting Edge: stem cell research in Europe 2007” (Brussels, 18 December)

## **5. THE TEACHING OF RELIGION IN THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS**

- 5.1. In matters pertaining to the content of the teaching of the catholic faith in the European schools, in various Member States, COMECE is recognised by the *Conseil Supérieur* of European schools as the representative of the interests of the local Bishops in whose dioceses these schools are located. As in previous years, regular contacts have been maintained by the secretariat throughout the year with the Conseil Supérieur.
- 5.2. The Secretary General of COMECE and drs. Michael Kuhn were briefed on developments regarding the teaching of religion in the European schools by the COMECE adviser for this field, Mme. Catherine Roba.
- 5.3. The Plenary meeting in November was briefed about developments concerning the reduction of group sizes in European schools which carries the risk that for certain years and individual denominations religious instruction will not longer be possible.
- 5.4. At its regular meeting on 18 April 2007 in Lisbon, the Board of Governors decided to amend Chapter XIX of its decisions concerning group numbers and minimum class sizes. According to this decision, classes of 30 or more pupils may be split up. At the same time, though, the number of pupils required to establish a class was increased from 5 to 7 pupils.
- 5.5. In a letter dated 1 June and addressed to Mr M. Ryan, Secretary-General of the Board of Governors, the representatives of the churches and Local Ordinaries responsible for religious instruction in the European Schools expressed their opposition to the consequences of these amendments to Chapter XIX, and requested that this issue be clarified in discussion. Subsequently, a meeting took place on 26 June 2007 but it did not produce a definitive solution. Further talks were held in autumn 2007.

## **6. ECUMENICAL CONTACTS AND COLLABORATION**

- 6.1. Throughout the year contacts were maintained with the secretariat of the Commission for Church and Society (CSC) of the Conference of European Churches, with the Brussels office of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, with the Representation of the Greek Orthodox Church, with the Representation of the Patriarchate of Moscow, with the office of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) and with offices of the Churches' Committee for Migration in Europe (CCME) and Eurodiaconia.

- 6.2 In co-operation with the Commission for Church and Society (CSC) of the Conference of European Churches and other Church offices, the COMECE secretariat prepared and organised a Taizé Day for European officials on 30 January. For this occasion several brothers from the Taizé Community, among them Prior Frère Alois came to Brussels. A morning prayer was organised in the Chapel of Resurrection and over lunch the Representation of Baden-Württemberg opened its doors. About 1.500 people attended the evening prayer in the Cathedral. In the course of the day Fr. Alois met with Prof. Hans Gert Pötering, the President of the European Parliament, and with Mr. Jacques Barrot, the vice-president of the European Commission.
- 6.3 It is worth noting that an important ecumenical delegation took part in the Rome Congress and that representatives of other Churches were asked for a contribution to the programme.
- 6.4 COMECE participated in the second stage of the European Ecumenical Assembly in Wittenberg (President and Secretary General) on 15-18.02. The President, the Secretary General and his assistant were delegates to last stage of the Third Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, 04-09 September. Further staff members were present to assist with the organisation (M. Oger and J. Touzel).
- 6.5 Throughout the year the staff of the secretariat received ecumenical groups from the Member States and from other countries. The staff members invited CEC, EKD and the Orthodox representatives to breakfast and lunch meetings which led to fruitful co-operation in a range of policy areas.
- 6.6 The Secretary General took part in the Tenth Dialogue between the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament and the Orthodox Churches, in Bratislava, 09-10 November. The theme of the international conference was Breaking New Ground for Europe: Through Solidarity for People – Religion and Politics in Action. It is worth recording that this was the last Dialogue to be organised prior to his retirement by Mr. Stephen Biller, UK adviser to the EPP Group in the European Parliament since 1973, a loyal supporter and friend of COMECE, who organised this annual event since its inception.

## **7. CO-OPERATION WITH CCEE AND THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCES**

- 7.1 As a member of the CCEE-KEK Joint Committee the Secretary General of COMECE attended its meeting on 18–20.02 in Wittenberg.
- 7.2 The presidencies of CCEE and COMECE met on 23 Mai 2007 in Berlin
- 7.3 Regular contacts and exchange of information were maintained between the secretariats of COMECE and CCEE. The Secretary General attended the annual meeting of the General Secretaries of the Bishops' Conferences, Minsk, 14-18 June.
- 7.4 The President and Secretary General attended and reported on the work of COMECE to the CCEE Plenary meeting in Fatima, 03-07 October.
- 7.5 Several enquiries from the Bishops' Conferences regarding EU policy issues were dealt with. The secretariat played a vital role in keeping the services of Bishops' Conferences informed of developments in a range of EU policy areas as indicated throughout this report.

- 7.6 Circular letters were sent to the COMECE member bishops and secretariats of the Episcopal Conferences regarding policy issues to (i) provide information, and/or (ii) to suggest that appropriate contact be made with national politicians or (iii) to suggest input to EU consultation processes.

## **8 LOOKING FORWARD TO 2008**

- 8.1 The COMECE and its secretariat will continue to monitor European Union policy-making in all relevant domains on behalf of the Bishops' Conferences of the Member States and of the candidate countries. To this end the European Commission's work Programme will be scrutinised in order to identify issues to be followed. Particular attention will be given to consultations launched during the course of the year. The work of the Parliament and Council will also be closely monitored.
- 8.2 Close attention will be given to the development of the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. In this regard particular attention will be given to debates surrounding article 17 in the Treaty on the functioning of the Union.
- 8.5 Reflections on a possible follow-up to the COMECE Congress in Rome (23-25 March 2007) will be intensified. Taking up the proposal of COMECE member Mgr Giuseppe Merisi the idea of organising a European Social Week will be investigated through a "brainstorming meeting" in January 2007. In this it has to be taken account of the fact that an initiative with this name already exists and that the expression "Social Week" is known only in the "Latin" EU countries. Some reservations exist therefore on the expression but the concept finds a lot of support
- 8.6 COMECE will take part in the meeting of the Co-ordination for Episcopal Conferences in support of the Church in the Holy Land in Jerusalem.
- 8.7 An effective contribution to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 through a series of lectures in the European Parliament, co-organised with CSC-CEC and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, shall be made.
- 8.8 A report of the Expert Group on EU Climate Change Policy and Christian Life-style shall be published and presented to the bishops of COMECE.
- 8.9 Initiatives in relation to the secretariat document *Proposal for a strategy of the European Union for the support of Family and Marriage* (2007), will be promoted and followed through by the secretariat.
- 8.10 COMECE will actively work for an EU-response to the plight of Iraqi refugees in Jordan, Syria and Turkey, many of whom are of Christian faith.
- 8.11 The proceedings of the Summer University 2007 (Graz/Seggau) will be published. Together with the Department for International Affairs of the University of Graz and the Academic Board the Summer University programme for 2008 will be conceived and planned. The secretariat will again engage in fund-raising with a view to raising some 20 burses for the support of the student participants.
- 8.12 COMECE will continue to liaise with its ecumenical partners in Brussels.

- 8.13 As in recent years a visit programme to the EU institutions will be prepared for the Westminster interns. Efforts will be undertaken to investigate the possibility of extending this programme to include the European Parliament, firstly for British candidates – as an extension of the present programme. Thereafter and in the course of 2008 the possibility of “Europeanising” the initiative will be investigated. Both phases will entail securing the spiritual and academic accompaniment of the candidates, both integral parts of the programme.
- 8.14 The COMECE secretariat together with Mme. C. Roba will give particular attention to developments in regard to the teaching of religion in the European Schools in the course of 2007. It will take all proactive steps to defend its place on the curriculum.

*N.Treanor/S.Lunte*

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