

# ANNUAL REPORT 2008

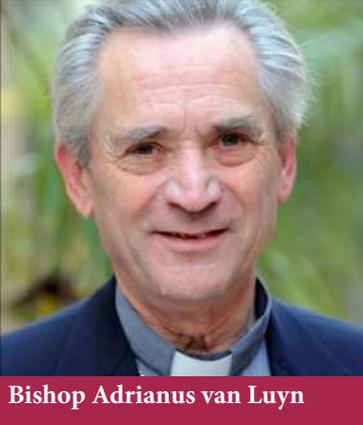
COMMISSION OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCES  
OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY



# COMECE ANNUAL REPORT 2008

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# 1 | FOREWORD



## Dear Readers,

The year 2008 has been marked by many changes for COMECE. The departure of the General Secretary, Mgr. Noël Treanor, who was ordained Bishop of Down and Connor on 29 June 2008; the move of the Secretariat to the new offices at Square de Meeûs: and the appointment of Fr Piotr Mazurkiewicz as the new General Secretary of COMECE who took up the post in October 2008.

Renovating and moving into a new building are not activities that happen overnight. It all takes time. But there eventually comes a moment when one can say that we have got there at last and a new chapter can begin. This is where we are today, and I should like to suggest that we take this opportunity to look back with gratitude, and to look forward with the utmost confidence.

This joyful occasion, as I'm sure you can imagine, did not come about by chance but is the product of years of persistent effort. The catalyst in our case was the accession of ten countries to the European Union on 1 May 2004. For quite some time, the beautiful building at number 42 Rue Stévin had become too small to accommodate the wide range of activities undertaken by COMECE. Three individuals, whose foresight I should especially like to commend today, seized the initiative. Bishop Noël Treanor of Down and Connor, who was General Secretary at that time; my predecessor, Bishop Josef Homeyer; and Mr Edgar Panholzer, a German lawyer and financial advisor. These three people are therefore the first to receive my thanks for enabling the Executive Committee to pass a resolution approving the purchase of a new building in June 2004.

That all these efforts were well worth it is, in my view, clear to see. Functional and yet friendly offices, properly equipped meeting rooms, and the Chapel located at the entrance of the building, characterise the new premises. This lovely building on Square de Meeûs, in the heart of Brussels' European district, has been turned into a Secretariat for COMECE that certainly exceeds the high expectations which we had for it. I can sum up my own expectations for this building in a single sentence: I hope that the COMECE Secretariat will become a House for the Church in Europe.

In his brilliant essay entitled "Europe", the great French poet and diplomat Paul Claudel wrote a brief sentence which underlines the importance of the Catholic Church for the evolution of Europe: "*The Catholic Church is the sanctification of movement.*" Whether it is through ascending prayers of glo-

rification under the spires of a Gothic cathedral or through kneeling in supplication in the shadow of a Baroque dome – throughout the centuries these Christian monuments have been a symbol for 'movement' in Europe. This, for Claudel, is where Christianity differs most from other religions, especially the Asian religions.

I should like to look at today's Church in Europe in line with this tradition. The Church in Europe should not be smugly complacent and self-satisfied, or else it would become a sect. The Church in Europe should not be static and inward-looking, but rather to progress. In the context of the activity with which COMECE concerns itself, namely the monitoring of the European unification process, such progression consists in contributing to the Europeanisation of Europe. Pope John Paul II repeatedly called for this, because – to echo the words of our present Pope Benedict – a Europe of nation-states cannot lay the foundations of a tenable blueprint for lasting peace.

The times have passed when theology and the Church set the style in Europe for an entire era. There are no contemporary equivalents of Gothic and Baroque in terms of ecclesiastic-religious forms of expression. There are certain advantages to this, and we Bishops should not complain. The vogues of our age, political and economic power, no longer bend to ecclesiastic imperatives. This is not to say, however, that our era exists in a vacuum. Other style-setting forces have replaced the Church. It would be going too far to list them here, but I should like to draw attention to the modified role now played by the Church in Europe, which has evolved as it questions, both critically and constructively, new aesthetic, ethical, technological and political developments. "*Scrutinise everything and retain what is good.*" Thus we Bishops of COMECE wish to contribute to a Church in Europe being a movement and a force for the good. This goal is perceived by COMECE and its Secretariat as part of their mission.

The Church in Europe remains a part of the one Catholic Church around the globe. As such, it cannot restrict its focus to Europe. In today's world, the Church will always want to contribute something towards the humanisation of the entire world. Movement towards the good, which I mentioned just now, will therefore always be an invitation to movement beyond the boundaries of Europe. It is revealing that it is at this point that the Church's aspirations collide with a self-image of Europe purged of superficial economic interests. Paul Claudel, poet and diplomat, in the text quoted earlier dating from the immediate post-war era, described this self-image as follows: "*Europe will only find its soul and its unity when it embraces its function of serving as an instrument for the unification of humanity as a whole.*"

**Bishop Adrianus van Luyn sdb**  
**President of COMECE**

## 2 | A NEW HOME FOR COMECE

The COMECE Secretariat moved into its new premises on 8 December 2008.

The most common reaction from the many guests and visitors to COMECE in the Rue Stevin used to be: *“What a superb office! It has so much character and charm. It’s almost as good as being at home!”*

Indeed it did have character and charm, that typical Brussels Maison de maître at Number 42 Rue Stévin: a large entrance through which vehicles used to pass so that visitors could get out without getting their feet wet, high-ceilinged rooms with the original turn-of-the-century plasterwork, a drawing room and a dining room, reached by ascending a red-carpeted flight of stairs...

It was an ideal atmosphere in which to welcome guests and hold interesting discussions over the course of a very informal meal. COMECE was famous for its lunches, leading to the observation: *“At COMECE we combine what is pleasant with what is pressing.”*

However, what many visitors did not know was that the house was slowly descending into chaos. Originally, it had housed the General Secretary’s apartment, two guest rooms, offices for five permanent staff and a conference room seating approximately 40–50 people. Staff numbers gradually increased and conditions became more cramped. First, the General Secretary had to move out to another apartment to make room for office space, and the house ended up filled to the rafters with work stations. Also, some of the technical equipment at our disposal was not entirely up-to-date.

Shortly after the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, Mgr. Noël Treanor, who was then General Secretary, began looking for larger premises suitable for accommodating all the staff. It was not easy to satisfy all requirements: there had to be enough space for staff offices and the premises needed to be able to cope with a potential swelling in the ranks of the COMECE personnel, but there was also a desire to recapture some of the old COMECE magic in the working atmosphere.

Our search came to an end in the Square de Meeûs, near the European Parliament. A house which contains both offices and apartments with a garden (no larger than a courtyard) in which there is a small adjoining building – just the very thing for converting into a meeting room and accommodating the General Secretary’s apartment on the first floor. COMECE went on to purchase the building and – once planning permission had been granted – began the building work last year.

The result is an office cum residential building in which an attempt has been made to do justice to the requirements mentioned above: two modern floors provide enough space for the functionally-equipped offices of the COMECE staff. But we have also spared a thought for tradition: on the first floor

there is a library doubling up as a drawing room and a dining room with the beloved oval dining table. This is where the old tradition of ‘lunching at COMECE’ will be resumed and perpetuated.

COMECE also has a new chapel. It is located in the entrance area of the house and is open not just to members and staff, but also to passers-by wishing to spend a moment in prayer. In the rear wing there is a large meeting room, big enough to hold even the COMECE General Assembly. Up to 100 people can be seated here for lectures and presentations.

This house, with its myriad and diverse possibilities, will now be of great use to us. The large room is an outright invitation to hold events similar to those held in the old premises – such as our soirées – on a more or less monthly basis. The same goes for the library: now that COMECE has found a new exhibition venue, it would also be interesting to hold small events there – with European Parliament interns, for example, or in-depth talks with interested parties from the European Institutions on socio-political issues. It will be a challenge to identify, discover and test all these new possibilities. It was with a rather heavy heart that the Secretariat moved from the Rue Stévin to the new building on 8 December 2008. Now everything is ‘up and running’ in the new house and, once we have found a home for everything, all that remains is for us to make our new abode as cosy and homely as possible.

**Michael Kuhn**



New COMECE Building on Square de Meeûs

## 3 | REPORT OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Executive Committee consists of the President, two Vice-Presidents and the General Secretary. Most Rev. Adrianus van Luyn, Bishop of Rotterdam and President of the Bishops Conference of the Netherlands is the current President, together with Most Rev. Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin (Ireland) and Most Rev. Piotr Jarecki, Auxiliary Bishop of Warsaw (Poland) who are Vice-Presidents. The Apostolic Nuncio to the European Communities Archbishop André Dupuy also attended the meetings.

The Executive Committee of COMECE met on 4 occasions in 2008: 8 February and 5 March in Brussels, on 13 June in Rome, 16 September and 12 November again in Brussels. At each meeting, the President and the Vice Presidents received a report on the current activities and initiatives of the COMECE Secretariat as well as an information report on current EU issues. The Executive Committee prepared the material for submission to the Assembly for examination and took care of the implementation phase of the Assembly's decisions.



Mgr. Noel Treanor, former General Secretary of COMECE



Bishop Adrianus van Luyn

Bishop Diarmuid Martin



Bishop Piotr Jarecki

Fr Piotr Mazurkiewicz

## 4 | COMECE PLENARY ASSEMBLIES

COMECE holds two plenary meetings each year, which set out the main lines of its work. The Apostolic Nuncio to the European Communities participates in these meetings. A seminal issue of the European integration process provides the core theme of each meeting.

### 4.1 | Spring Plenary Assembly 5-7 March 2008

The Member Bishops of COMECE met from the 5th to the 7th of March 2008 in Brussels, for the Spring Plenary Assembly, the main topic being ‘Respecting human dignity and safeguarding the Creation – incarnation of the Common good in the EU policies of the 21st century’. The Bishops were informed about the institutional and political revival of Europe in recent months, with the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon and the implementation of ambitious policies to address the issue of climate change. They now invite the leaders of the EU Institutions to express clearly their understanding of human development envisaged in the European unification process in which the peoples are to be engaged.

Having received a report on the state of play of the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in the 27 Member States, the COMECE Bishops examined the direction that could be taken by the European unification process, through the presentation of the mission of the Reflection group “*Horizon 2020-2030*”, set up by the Heads of State and government to reflect on the long term challenges awaiting the EU.

Although the question of the institutional mechanisms may be resolved soon, the crucial question of the aims and meaning of the European project is still open, and the answer remains unclear for many European citizens. As underlined by Bishop van Luyn, President of COMECE, in his opening speech, *‘we are now all aware that, as a rule, the ‘how questions’ are the easiest. It’s harder to answer questions that start with ‘why’ and ‘wherefore?’ (...) Behind the day-to-day business*

*of politics, the vast majority of people can no longer recognise or fathom why things are going in one direction or another’. He added that ‘behind politics resides metapolitics, which forms the values upon which all political action is based, above and beyond party lines’.*

The subject of the Plenary Assembly enabled the Bishops to reflect on two fundamental values, which could guide the European unification, remobilise the support of citizens and be translated into concrete EU policies: respect for human dignity and safeguarding the Creation.

Human dignity is at heart of the debates on the reform of schools and universities, as well as of the discussions on the European Research Policy. The Bishops also debated with Jérôme Vignon (European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) the demands of human dignity in the context of changing employment patterns. They underlined the importance of the respect for human dignity especially in the context of the protection of life.

Safeguarding Creation is at the crossroads of the concern of both political leaders and Christians in Europe, through the elaboration of measures to combat climate change. In November 2007, the COMECE Bishops set up a reflection group on “*Climate change and Christian Lifestyle*”. The President of this ad hoc group, former EU-Commissioner and President of the eco-social Forum Europa, Dr. Franz Fischler, presented to the Bishops a mid-term report of the work of the group. The final report is expected by next autumn.

Finally, the COMECE Bishops acknowledged the achievements of Mgr. Noël Treanor, Secretary General of COMECE since 1993, and his efforts to assist the Catholic Church as a proactive partner in dialogue with the EU institutions. Mgr. Noël Treanor was to be ordained Bishop of Down & Connor (Northern Ireland) on 29 June.



Fr Mazurkiewicz, Bishop van Luyn and Mr Saryusz-Wolski, MEP

## 4.2 | Autumn Plenary assembly 12-14 November 2008

The financial crisis has exposed a deeper spiritual crisis and a misguided set of values. The sense and value of human work has been pushed to the background in the general struggle for profit, the COMECE Bishops stated with regret on the occasion of their Autumn Plenary Assembly. This meeting, which took place from 12 to 14 November in the new offices of CO-



Bishop Adrianus van Luyn and EU Commissioner Jacques Barrot

MECE in square de Meeûs 19 in Brussels, was also marked by the presence of Fr Piotr Mazurkiewicz as the new Secretary General.

With «*the current challenges for the European Union*» as its main topic, the Plenary Assembly gave the Member Bishops of COMECE the opportunity to analyse the triple crises confronting the EU during recent months: the result of the Irish Referendum which suspended the Lisbon Treaty and the associated institutional Reform of the EU; the geopolitical crisis resulting from the war between Russia and Georgia; and, finally, the financial and economic crisis.

Bishop Adrianus van Luyn, President of COMECE, called for the scale of the crisis not to be underestimated: “*Whoever considers the cause of the financial crisis to reside solely in a lack of transparency and legal accountability is perhaps overlooking the fact that it is far more our societal model that is being called into question. An economic model that is based on the continued and unlimited consumption of limited resources can only end in tears.*” He believes that the deeper cause of the financial crisis lies in “*a misguided set of values*”.

The financial crisis also offers the opportunity to question more incisively the lifestyle of Western society. In this context, the COMECE Bishops received the report “*A Christian View on Climate Change*” prepared by the Expert Group that they had set up in November 2007. The Bishops took note of the report’s conclusions: Climate change raises the question of survival for a large part of Mankind; strong political leadership and, more profoundly, ethical reflection and debate are needed to win over not only the minds but also the hearts of citizens and convince them to distance themselves from the lifestyle predominant in our countries which is too single-

mindedly focused on consumption, particularly on high levels of energy consumption.

‘*Moderation*’ as a central virtue should constitute the core of this change of lifestyle. It is up to Christians to make their fellow-citizens aware that moderation can be synonymous with quality of life and with happiness, because it helps to distinguish the essential from the superfluous. The difficulty that Christians have in conveying the idea that a change of lifestyle is the key to the secret of a good and ultimately a happy life,



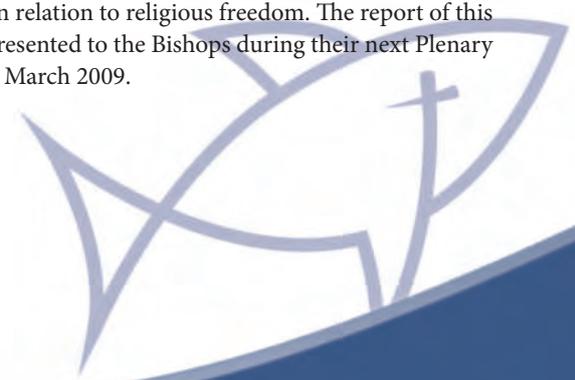
Autumn Plenary Assembly

represents another challenge for the Church.

In the same spirit, the Bishops called for respect for Sunday rest as one of the foundations of the European social model and as a way of balancing work and family life. In recent years, Sunday as a weekly rest day has been threatened by legislation in many Member States thanks to liberal and consumerist-driven political concepts. In the context of the present economic crisis, the COMECE Bishops call on the Members of the European Parliament to assume their responsibilities and include the protection of Sunday in the Working Time Directive that will be submitted to the European Parliament’s vote by the middle of December.

Concerning the situation of Christian Iraqi refugees, the Bishops call on the EU to recognise the essential role of Christianity in Iraq’s tradition and history and to continually raise - in its contacts and discussions with the Government of Iraq - the issue of the protection of the Christian community, today threatened with extinction, and of religious minorities in Iraq. More generally, the Bishops regret that the EU, in its relations with third countries, still puts insufficient efforts into attacking with determination the violation of the religious freedom of minorities in other parts of the world.

For their part, the Bishops tasked the COMECE Secretariat with setting-up an Expert group to consider the principle of reciprocity in relation to religious freedom. The report of this group was presented to the Bishops during their next Plenary Assembly in March 2009.



## 5 | WORKING GROUPS

In order to monitor the political processes of the European Union in all areas of interest to the Church, the COMECE Secretariat set up a number of commissions, working groups and other bodies. These consist of specialists from the national Bishops' Conferences and lay people from the Member States providing the necessary expertise on the relevant fields.

### 5.1 | Bioethics reflection group

The Bioethics Reflection Group of COMECE is composed of experts from different EU Member States, who were chosen so as to provide for a multi- and inter-disciplinary exchange of views. They combine theological, philosophical, ethical, legal, medical and other disciplines in the natural sciences. On a number of the subjects, specialists are invited to provide the Group with more specific knowledge. Since its establishment in 1996, the Group has elaborated 16 Opinions on a wide range of bioethical issues such as euthanasia, cloning, stem cell research, nanomedicine, patenting issues and organ donation.

In 2008, a publication "*Science and Ethics*" was issued by the COMECE Secretariat which brings together these Opinions. It is available in English and French.

#### Meeting of the Bioethics Reflection Group, 3 April 2008

The Bioethics Group discussed the draft publication of the Opinions it had issued since it came into existence in 1996. The members presented the bioethical issues currently on the agenda in their countries and in the European Union. They had an exchange of views on the future work of the Group.

#### Meeting of the Bioethics Reflection Group, 6-7 October 2008

At their autumn meeting, the Bioethics Group held an exchange of views about the bioethical issues in the Member States.

They had a brainstorming session on "*synthetic biology*" in order to identify the ethical issues raised by this emerging field of research; the issue is currently on the agenda of the work of the European Group on Ethics, advisory body to the European Commission.

The main topic for the meeting was the preparation of an

Opinion on the ethical implications of the principle of non-commercialisation of the human body and its parts. After the previous Opinion of the Group had treated the issue of organ donation, the Group had felt that the issue of non-commercialisation needed to be broadened with regard not only to organs, but also to tissues and cells. An introduction to the topic was given by Mr Peteris Zilgalvis, Head of Unit in the European Commission (DG Research) on the main legal and ethical implications.

On the basis of these discussions, the Group elaborated an Opinion "*La non-commercialisation des elements du corps humain*" which is available on the COMECE website.

### 5.2 | Working Group on Migration

The COMECE Working Group on Migration is composed of experts appointed by the interested Bishops' Conferences and discusses EU policies in the field, often in dialogue with representatives of the EU institutions. During the course of 2008 the Working Group met twice (February and October).

#### Meeting of the Working Group on Migration, 14 February 2008

In February the main focus was directed at refugee resettlement, with a presentation on the subject and an update on the situation of Christian Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan. In a letter dated 7 January 2008, addressed to Mr Dragutin Mate, Slovenian Minister for Home Affairs and at the time President of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, the President of COMECE Bishop van Luyn had drawn attention to the situation of the 4.4 million Iraqis, forced to leave their country. He called for action on the part of EU leaders and proposed that the governments of the EU take in up to 60.000 members of most vulnerable minorities (Christians, Mandaeans and Yazidis). A representative of the forthcoming French Presidency presented its priorities in the field of migration and asylum.



### Meeting of the Working Group on Migration, 28 October 2008

In October the issue of Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries was tackled again, with an open discussion about possible future steps and strategies in that regard (with particular reference to persecuted religious minorities). The details of the recently adopted European Pact on Immigration and Asylum were also discussed with a representative of the European Commission. A representative of the forthcoming Czech Presidency presented its priorities in the field of migration and asylum.

### Return Directive

The Working Group also debated the so-called 'Return Directive'. On 30 May 2008, Most Rev. van Luyn, President of COMECE, together with representatives of other Churches and Christian organisations, addressed a letter to the Members of the European Parliament expressing concern about the compromise on the 'Return Directive' on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals. The letter drew the MEPs' attention to the provisions concerning the maximum length of detention (18 months) and the entry ban for 'irregular' third-country nationals. While the concern of governments and societies is to uphold the rule of law in the EU Member States, Churches stressed that the dignity of every human being should also be respected.

## 5.3 | Social Affairs

The COMECE Commission on Social Affairs is composed of Bishops and/or Secretaries of the Social Commissions of Bishops' Conferences and chaired by Most Rev. Reinhard Marx, Archbishop of Munich & Freising, Member of COMECE. It discusses socio-ethical questions raised by the process of European integration and prepares statements for the Bishops of COMECE.

### Meeting of the Social Affairs Commission of COMECE 8-9 October 2008

The Bishop members of the Social Affairs Commission of COMECE met in Paris on 8-9 October 2008 for their annual meeting. Their exchange of views on the topic of "*The future of social protection and social policy in Europe*" was marked by the crisis in the financial markets and its consequences for social policy in Europe. The participants at the meeting were Bishops and/or Secretaries of the Social Commissions of the Bishops' Conferences of Germany, England & Wales, Austria, Spain, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia as well as the General Secretary of COMECE, Fr. Piotr Mazurkiewicz.

« We have arrived at the precise moment where the European social model should prove itself in order to avoid turning the financial crisis into a political and social crisis.» With these words, Most Rev. Reinhard Marx, Archbishop of Munich

(Germany) and President of the Social Affairs Commission of COMECE concluded the meeting. Furthermore, the members of the Commission noted with interest the Declaration of the Council for Family and Social Issues of the French Bishops' Conference concerning the financial crisis.

Invited to present the current situation of social security and pension systems in the EU, Ms Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, MEP (Greece), called to mind the social agenda and the family package for a better balance between work and family, both launched by the European Commission. The Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the European Commission, Mr Nikolaus G. van der Pas presented the new social agenda from a political perspective.

In the second part of their meeting, the Members of the Commission for Social Affairs of COMECE exchanged views on their respective priorities. In particular, they examined new initiatives to promote the social teaching of the Church throughout Europe. Most Rev. Piotr Jarecki, Auxiliary Bishop of Warsaw and Vice-President of COMECE, presented a proposal for the first European Social Conference scheduled to take place in Gdansk (Poland) in October 2009.



## 5.4 | Legal Affairs Commission

The Legal Affairs Commission met on 24 January, 26 June and 17 October 2008

The Legal Affairs Commission is a forum for discussion and exchange of information on legal and political matters pertaining to the institutional setting of the European Union, fundamental rights issues and equal treatment, dialogue between the EU and Churches, employment law, civil justice, and other legal matters. It is composed of legal experts delegated by the Bishops' Conferences of EU Member States. Currently it consists of 12 members meeting three times a year at the COMECE offices in Brussels. Officials of the European institutions are usually invited as external experts. These encounters contribute to maintaining the open, transparent and regular dialogue between Churches and the EU.

Each meeting starts with a roundtable discussion allowing members of the Legal Affairs Commission to present recent developments of importance for the Church in their respective countries. A considerable part of the meetings is devoted to discussions on the institutional framework of the Union and the relations between Churches and the EU. In 2008 particular attention was devoted to the Treaty of Lisbon, its major legal innovations, the process of ratification, and the consequences of its rejection in the Irish referendum. Discussions were also devoted to developing concrete ideas as regards the so-called "Church Article" introduced by the Lisbon Treaty

and providing a legal basis for maintaining and enhancing dialogue between the EU and the Churches.

In 2008 discussions also concerned the issue of non-discrimination and equal treatment. In particular, members discussed the proposal for a directive prohibiting discrimination outside employment, the jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice in this area, and the functioning of the European Fundamental Rights Agency (EFRA).

The employment law issues, as well as social legislation, touch upon the fundamental question of balance between family and professional life. In this area the in-depth discussions referred to matters such as the new Commission's package for reconciling work and family life, the revision of the Working Time Directive, and the possible inclusion in this Directive of Sunday as a weekly rest day. Although family law remains within the competence of the Member States, EU policies often indirectly touch upon these matters. Therefore, there was reflection on matters relating to the area of civil justice, such as maintenance obligations and matrimonial matters, and also the question of adoption.

Each year a summary of the most important initiatives contained in the Legislative and Work Programme of the European Commission is discussed, allowing members of the Legal Affairs Commission to identify future legislative projects and challenges.



European Commission

## 6 | INITIATIVES

COMECE organises conferences on major issues of current interest, information sessions and seminars to promote contacts between Church bodies and people from the European Institutions.

### 6.1 | The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008



COMECE-KEK-KAS Seminar at the European Parliament

Report on the “*Islam, Christianity and Europe*” Seminars at the European Parliament

The COMECE Secretariat, the ‘*Church and Society*’ Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CEC-KEK) and the European Bureau of the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation (KAS) organised 4 seminars at the European Parliament in Brussels as part of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008).

These seminars, each of which attracted a hundred or so participants, set out to raise awareness, among policy-makers and civil servants of the European institutions, of the issues associated with Islam in Europe and of EU external relations with Muslim majority countries, within the framework of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The three Christian organising bodies invited imams and eight Muslim organisations operating in Europe: the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (FIOE), the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO), the Conseil musulman de Coopération en Europe (CMCE), the European Islamic Conference (EIC), the European Forum of Muslim Women (EFOMW), the European Muslim Network (EMN), the Intercultural Dialogue Platform (IDP) and the Institut européen d’Humanisme musulman (IEHM).

Summary reports have been drawn up and are available to the general public<sup>1</sup>. What are the main threads identified in these dialogues? **The first seminar** (17 April 2008) posed a question that laid down a challenge to the European Year 2008: ‘Intercultural Dialogue: response to what problems?’. The seminar identified paths towards an understanding of the affirmation of religious identity for immigrant Muslim populations. A lack of acknowledgement because of inadequate economic and social integration and marginalisation contributes to this

phenomenon. Economic, social, cultural, religious and identity problems are all intimately interwoven – a fact that has to be taken into account in the overall design of policies. With this in mind, we must strive to combine the last two Euro-



COMECE-KEK-KAS Seminar at the European Parliament

pean thematic years for future action: the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008), as well as the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007).

**The second seminar** (29 May 2008) dealt with the growing number of mosques being built in the context of the visibility of religion in public spaces. This new development is transforming the familiar urban spaces of European societies and is encountering resistance from society, despite the legal framework of freedom of religion and worship. One original way forward was proposed as part of an intercultural and participative approach: experience has shown that if the local inhabitants are involved in the decision on where to site a mosque, it is possible to overcome such resistance, which often arises out of fear of people who are different. In addition, an intercultural approach to the architecture of places of worship benefits their integration into the local scene.

**The third seminar** (3 July 2008) pointed out that inter-religious challenges are always inherent in a multicultural society, and that the identification of points of commonality between Islam and Christianity could lead to joint proposals for a vision of Europe: concern for the welfare of all humankind, the sacred nature of life and the commitment of believers in the public sphere to common values and concerns such as social justice.

**The fourth seminar** (11 September 2008) addressed the issue of reciprocity in matters of religious freedom within the context of EU external relations. Many opposing views were raised at this seminar which highlighted the fact that there has to be dialogue for a meaningful exchange of views on controversial issues. Although we can report that all partners subscribed to the notion of religious freedom as a fundamental and universal human right, there was dissent concerning the concept of reciprocity considered to be essential in pro-

moting this right. This seminar certainly put down markers that will be used in follow-up Christian-Muslim dialogue in the future.

The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue has come to an end. To keep up the impetus from 2008 into future years is the challenge that faces everyone interested in social cohesion and civil peace in Europe. One of the issues on which COMECE expects to work is the promotion of religious freedom both within and outside the EU, with a particular focus on religious rights of religious minorities.

## 6.2 | Ecumenical Retreat in Kranenburg

On 20 September 2008, the COMECE Secretariat organised, in association with other Church representatives in Brussels, a day trip to the German-Dutch border on the theme A-Cross Europe.

Today, the site where thousands fell in the First World War is a place of reconciliation. And reconciliation was also the order of the day for the Catholic, evangelical and orthodox participants, who numbered more than 60. First, it was an opportunity to reflect on the purpose and goals of Europe and not to lose sight of the broader European vision in the midst of the more day-to-day concerns of Community life in Brussels. Those who took part work either in or alongside the institutions. Together with representatives from the church agencies, their task was to explore the Christian take on 'reconciliation': participants were inspired not just by the Christian testimonies of speakers invited to give special addresses on the topic, but also by the atmosphere conjured up by the location, which is an important place of pilgrimage for the Catholic church. (The collegiate church of Sts. Peter and Paul has just celebrated 700 years of pilgrimages to their relic.)

A-Cross Europe: This choice of title for the event was prompted in equal measure by the preoccupation with the Cross as the central reason for reconciliation from a Christian point of view and the cross-border nature of the day. People from 22 nations took part in the trip, which took in three European states. Joining them were two people who each gave personal accounts of reconciliation in practice. First to speak was Desney Cromie from Belfast, citing her experiences in Northern Ireland, a European country where confessional divides within Christianity still lead to bloodshed. With the aid of several case studies, she demonstrated how people are able to confine hatred to the past and build a new community. She was followed by Piotr Cywinski, director of the Auschwitz Memorial. Piotr Cywinski reported on both the practical problems of maintaining the Memorial, in particular its content, and his encounters with the people who visit it. His testimony added a personal note to the feeling of 'never again' that is foremost in all our memories in a manner more powerful than any history book could ever hope to convey.

A-Cross Europe – Looking beyond: However, the day was not just about looking back; it also looked ahead. That is why, after hearing the reports, participants divided into small groups in which they – in the light of what they had seen and heard – talked about Europe's vision for peaceful coexistence for human beings, in which peace represents more than the mere absence of war. From their various perspectives, they contributed stories and reflections to the theological discussion. The contributions were occasionally of a very personal nature, as individual experiences of reconciliation in private and political spheres were presented in connection with the stories heard. However, they also went above and beyond this. It became clear that the Cross is an especially apt symbol of reconciliation, because the person who performs the act of reconciliation also completely relinquishes his power and his demands and, furthermore, takes on a subordinate role to those whom he wishes to forgive. The results of these conversations then assumed a liturgical resonance: in an ecumenical meditation at the close of day, participants brought together in prayers and texts everything that had been discussed in small groups. Mgr Adrianus van Luyn, President of the Dutch Bishops' Conference and COMECE President, provided further food for thought. In his short sermon, he reminded those present - echoing, albeit in an unplanned way, the spontaneous conclusions reached by the group discussions - that the Cross was indeed the symbol of a victory: first, that of Christ over death, then that of the Christians in their Mission. Nevertheless, he also stressed that whoever follows the cross today ought not to focus on the victory, but rather on the path that leads to such a victory. The Cross, in the words of the bishop, was the symbol of a love so mighty it accepted death to save mankind. Bearing witness to Christ must therefore be a brave gesture, in which this love is embraced and those who believe are encouraged to conduct acts of love, in which they put the needs of their neighbour before their own. In this address, the Bishop of Rotterdam made it clear that 'reconciliation' is not easy to come by, but rather requires the commitment of each and every one of us – also, and especially so, when it is connected to our own burdens. Following the meditation and sermon, Orthodox and Protestant spiritual representatives, along with Mgr van Luyn, issued the final blessing to the group before participants made their way home to Brussels.

A-Cross Europe: This was a day that offered more than just time to think. The little town of Kranenburg also painted a vivid picture of the topic of the day. The Catholic priest and evangelical minister each welcomed the international 'group of pilgrims' to their churches. Günter Steins, mayor of Kranenburg, spoke to the visitors, informing them about how politics is carried out nowadays in border areas. Not only are cross-border council meetings now a matter of course in the region: as a German mayor, Günter Steins was even invited to make a speech on the other side of the border to mark the Dutch day of liberation. Here, 60 years after the end of the war, reconciliation is alive and kicking.

**Patrick Schnabel**

## 6.3 | International Summer School Seggauberg

28 June-12 July 2008

### “US Europe”, in search of one’s identity.

The 3rd Seggauberg International Summer School (ISSS) took place between the 28th June and 12th July 2008, in Seggauberg, a castle and training centre located in the bishopric of Graz-Seckau, near the Slovenian-Austrian border. On a practical level, the School was similar to the 2006 and 2007 Summer Schools: 79 participants from 26 countries, a programme which included lectures in the morning and seminars on six subject areas (law, science, history, sociology, cultural studies and media studies) in the afternoon and interesting evening activities, such as special lectures, panel discussions and films. This, the third Summer University in as many years, brings to a close the pilot phase that was agreed by the three organisers – the Karl-Franzen University in Graz, the diocese of Graz-Seckau and COMECE. In autumn, a new cooperation agreement, setting out how this successful project should be continued, will be negotiated and signed. Some key thoughts on this exercise are given below, together with a brief report on ISSS 2008 itself.

### “US Europe. Towards a multicultural Continent.”

This title was chosen for the very reason that it signifies many things all at the same time. Take the issue “US Europe”: never before has the question of what is meant by ‘Europe’ and ‘Europeans’ been asked and discussed with greater insistence than over the course of recent years. There are diverse, and often mixed, reasons for this. There is a sense of tension between the concept of ‘globalisation’ and a reawakened regional consciousness, between the ‘drive to harmonise’ in areas such as the economy, education and culture and the rediscovered interest in that which is one’s own, that which is special, as well as in regional culture, which many wish to defend at all costs. This European ‘us’ defines itself by setting itself apart from ‘the other’, that which is ‘not us’. This becomes particularly apparent when it comes to Europe’s relations with the USA – ‘US Europe’. The cultural and political

ties which bind Europe and the USA are centuries old. The past economic and scientific boom in the US is in no small part thanks to the (unintentional) ‘brain drain’ out of Europe; both the USA and Europe are guided by political principles such as democracy and the rule of law and, at the same time, the way they apply these principles in their day-to-day political workings sets them apart. The Iraq war and the different takes on the situation – albeit not only those held by the USA and the EU, but also by different members of the EU – served to demonstrate this point once again. These similarities in the midst of such striking differences between the USA and Europe is perplexing and invites further examination. Things start to get interesting when the vision which once guided the process of European integration, is highlighted by American political scientists – such as Jeremy Rifkin – as an example and emphasised as boding well for the future – “It’s so much easier for Europe...” – implying that Europeans do not always seem to be aware of the advantages of their societal and political model.

The issue of EU/US relations was constantly revisited in all its forms at the ISSS: in the keynote address by Prof. Manfred Prisching, who holds the Chair of Sociology at the Karl-Franzen University and is an expert on the USA; in seminars and discussions with teachers – two of which were from “across the pond”; or in the evening events and meetings between the students themselves. One question, however, cropped up in every discussion in a variety of different forms: the question of identity.

### Who are we?

“How do we see ourselves?” and “How do we see other people?”

The notion of one’s own identity, which fluctuates between both these questions, was suddenly thrown into sharp focus during the Summer University in a discussion with a group of female Romanian students. At the same time, it serves as an example of how many of the students from South-East Europe and the new Member States see themselves.

Over the first few days of ISSS 2008, a screening took place of the film *Code inconnu* by Austrian director Michael Haneke. The film deals with the topic of how people from different cultural backgrounds (‘codes’) relate to one another and the difficulties in which they can become entangled to the point of committing acts of violence. In one of the first scenes, a young Frenchman carelessly throws a screwed up piece of paper into the lap of a beggar, which leads a young African man to challenge him and demand that he apologise to the beggar. The scuffle which follows is brought to an end when the police intervene, but they arrest the beggar because she is residing illegally in the country. She is deported by plane to her home country – in this case, Romania.

After the film, this scene prompted a serious discussion, which really gained momentum on the following day: several female students felt stigmatised by the film. They were of the opinion that it had been chosen to poke fun at Romanians and to label Romania as a ‘country of beggars’. Initial attempts to convince them of the fact that the beggar in the film is Ro-



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manian had nothing to do with why the film was chosen more or less fell on deaf ears. The girls' self-esteem had taken a serious knock and they did not want to discuss it.

By chance, the person presenting the next day's lecture used the very same film sequence in his talk on 'hybrid identities'. In the subsequent discussion, the sequence was discussed in detail: those present commented on the behaviour of the two young men, the way the police conducted themselves and the reaction of the public. Speakers also gave their observations regarding film and cultural theory. Yet no one even once mentioned the fact that the beggar in the film was Romanian. No one – other than the Romanian participants – felt this to be of any importance.

In a later discussion with the students, the extent to which their reaction had been affected by their assumptions about how they are seen by others became clear. As one of the students put it: *"Everybody thinks every Romanian is a beggar. We try to do our best and show the world that there is another side to Romania, but no-one is interested in that side. We came here to talk with other graduates in our own age group, and the first thing that's thrown at us is this stereotyped and stigmatising portrayal of Romania."* The discussion demonstrated to her the extent to which her self-perception and the manner in which she thought others perceived her had dictated the way she felt about herself and how great was the gap between how you think people feel about you and how they really do feel about you.

### A permanent task

The Seggauberg International Summer School was founded in 2005 with a view to promoting dialogue between students from old and new EU Member States and countries in South-East Europe and providing them with the opportunity to get to know one another better. Different experiences stimulated by past events lead to different takes on the same events. We have yet to shake off the preconceptions of the *'decadent West'* and *'backward East'*. The task of the ISSS is to talk about this and to try to bridge the divides of the past and find a common language, common projects and a common goal (and also, in so doing, to rediscover our common roots). The aforementioned example shows that we are still a long way from achieving these goals.

Over the next few weeks, discussions will be held on a new framework for the ISSS. Sponsors will be sought out to help fund the ISSS and the programme will be further developed. To give an example, the area of 'Ethics and Theology' will be a core component of a future seminar. At the same time, thought is being given as to whether the programme should be opened up and whether interns at the European Parliament should be given the opportunity to apply for a bursary for the ISSS. Europe must reach out to its citizens, especially its young citizens, if it wants to survive. This, at least, was the view taken by the many communication papers and strategies produced by the European institutions. With the Seggauberg International Summer School, the church and the university are already demonstrating how to succeed in such a task.

**Michael Kuhn**



Summerschool 2008

## 7 | DIALOGUE WITH THE EU

### 7.1 | Summit meeting of religious leaders with the Presidents of the European Institutions

1 May 2008

At the beginning of May, 21 participants representing the monotheistic religions in Europe participated in this meeting, together with the President of the European Commission, the President of the EU Council and the President of the European Parliament.

The President-in-office of the EU Council, the Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša, summarized the 4th annual meeting of the EU institutions' leaders with the Church and Religious representatives in Europe on 5 May in Brussels. The Church and Religious leaders affirmed a shared responsibility with political leaders on the future of the planet.

Recalling that the Bible speaks of 'creation' rather than of 'nature', Cardinal Franc Rodé (Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life) considered that it is difficult to feel responsible for 'nature', a concept referring to endless resources. The concept of 'creation' however evokes the responsibility of mankind. He emphasised that *'In the present world, we are called to an ascetic and unpretentious way of living in order to preserve the creation's resources and share them with the poorest populations.'* H.E Anders Harald Wejryd, (Primate of the Lutheran Church of Sweden) added that it was a duty of Religions to engage in combating climate change, since this issue raises questions of *'moral, justice and equity'*. Since Churches propose a perspective of Hope on a long term perspective, religions can help to take the challenge of climate change which is often obscured by apparently insurmountable difficulties.

*'Laws and regulations alone are not enough when it comes to making a new, more climate-friendly lifestyle popular'* underlined Bishop Adrianus van Luyn, President of COMECE, in his allocution. *'What is also called for is undoubtedly a different type of spiritual behaviour, to which churches and religions can contribute.'* On the institutional level, he suggested that, alongside the High Representative for External Affairs, a High Representative for Future Generations should be appointed by the European Union and that both officers be made Vice-Presidents of the European Commission. *'This would go a long way towards sending a clear signal of our hopes for a Europe that will demonstrate solidarity beyond geographical and temporal borders'* he indicated.

A propos the second theme of the meeting "Reconciliation between peoples", Bishop van Luyn underlined that *'trade relations and material aid won't be sufficient to protect against a clash of cultures in the long term. In order to go the distance, reconciliation calls for a dialogue of cultures, which also brings*



Mr. Jansa, Mr. Barroso and Bishop van Luyn

*together the representatives of different traditions and religions in joint discussions.'* He therefore suggested that the future External service of the EU, which will be implemented by the application of the Lisbon Treaty, be given a "department for dialogue with religions" and that the service's diplomats be briefed about religions and inter-religious dialogue as part of their training.

The President of the European Commission, Mr. Barroso, suggested that, in its fight against the clash of civilisations, Europe should base its own identity on diversity, "a reconciled diversity".

Mr. Pöttering, President of the European Parliament, underlined that a *'True dialogue means each component of society is able to express its point of view with respect for the other. Consensus can then emerge from the truth about particular values or goals.'* He added *'I firmly believe that the European Union, as well as our neighbours, can benefit greatly from dialogue between religions. True believers are willing to give of themselves in service of the common good. You have a great responsibility in seeking to present an understanding of faith in terms of peaceful coexistence and reconciliation. You can contribute to building a world founded on respect for human dignity. Our unique system of interdependent democracies can only flourish when it is underpinned by fundamental values and principles. In these modern times, when relativism often risks undermining our society, I am sure that many people take sustenance from their religious beliefs to inform them in their reasoned decision-making.'*

Considering that Intercultural Dialogue is an ongoing process, Mr. Pöttering expressed his hope that the EU institutions pursue this dialogue with the Faith communities throughout the year, anticipating thereby the application of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU which stipulates an “open, transparent and regular” Dialogue with Churches in article 17 of the consolidated version.

## 7.2 | Meetings with the EU Council Presidencies

### 7.2.1 | European Churches meet Slovenian EU Presidency

19 February 2008

#### Inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue needed more than ever

On 19 February a delegation of European and Slovenian churches was received by the Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa. The meeting took place at the request of the Commission of Bishops' Conferences in the European Community (COMECE) and the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) as part of the series of regular meetings between the churches and the EU Presidencies.

Due to the events around the declaration of independence of Kosovo, issues of peace, stability and reconciliation in the Western Balkans figured high on the agenda, one of the priorities of the Slovenian presidency. Both the Slovenian Prime Minister and the churches' representatives expressed their commitment to foster peace and reconciliation for the whole of the Balkan region. If there is any region in Europe where inter-cultural dialogue and inter-faith is needed it is the Western Balkans, the Prime Minister expressed in his response to the churches. And he welcomed the commitment and the contribution of the churches in the region as well as in Europe as a whole. The churches stressed the need for the EU to stay committed to the ultimate aim of a full EU membership for the states in the Western Balkans and to ensure through the EU Defence and Security Mission that human rights are fully implemented in Kosovo and in the region, especially for minorities. This includes also the protection and free access of holy sites and sites of worship.

Prime Minister Jansa thanked the churches for their commitment and contributions to the European integration process, in particular for their engagement in the debate around the Lisbon Treaty. The European Union is different after the enlargement process, and the fact that Slovenia is the first new member state to assume the EU Presidency is a significant symbol of this development, he pointed out.

The churches' delegation emphasized the need for a continued full involvement of religious communities in the inter-cultural dialogue and the 2008 European Year for Intercultural Dialogue in brokering sustainable reconciliation and integration.

As the EU is developing benchmarks for the further accession

talks with Turkey in the area of judiciary and fundamental rights, the churches underlined the importance for the EU to demand the full implementation of religious freedom in Turkey and to give religious communities a legal status.

Other issues on the agenda of the meeting included the revision of the European social agenda and issues related to European migration and asylum policies.

The church representatives handed over to the Prime Minister their recent responses to studies and communications of the European Commission with regard to the revision of the European social agenda. “*Social coherence and adequate social protection are for the churches integral elements of a successful and sustainable Lisbon strategy,*” Mgr. Noel Treanor and Rev. Rüdiger Noll emphasized on behalf of CEC and COMECE. “*Social protection includes a European framework for EU member states to establish effective, accessible and high-standard social and health systems. The churches as a major provider of social and health services in Europe play an important role in this,*” they added.

With regard to issues related to migration and asylum, the churches challenged the EU Presidency, inter alia, to reduce the temporary custody for illegally-staying non nationals, for the EU to join the Convention on Trafficking in Human Beings of the Council of Europe and to find lasting solutions with regard to Iraqi refugees.

Prime Minister Jansa welcomed the churches concerns and promised to take them into account as negotiations under the Slovenian EU Presidency continue. “*We are looking forward to a continued dialogue with the churches and the religious communities,*” he added. A further opportunity will be the meeting with religious leaders, to which the Presidents of the European Institutions are to invite in May.

The churches were represented in this meeting by: Rev. Rüdiger Noll, Director of the Church and Society Commission and Associate General Secretary of CEC, Bishop Geza Ernisa and President Dr. Aleksander Kercmar from the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia as well as by Mgr. Noel Treanor, General Secretary of COMECE and Bishop Anton Stres and Rev. Tadej Strehovec OFM from the Slovenian Bishops' Conference.

### 7.2.2 | European Churches meet the French EU Presidency

21 November 2008

Following a now well-established tradition, representatives of the Churches in Europe (Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community – COMECE - and Conference of European Churches – CEC) and in France met the French EU-Presidency today in Paris. The French State Secretary for European Affairs, M. Jean-Pierre Jouyet received the Church representatives in the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

The discussions focused on institutional issues (the future of the EU and the Lisbon Treaty) and on the financial crisis. The Church representatives, in their exchange of views with the State Secretary for European Affairs, expressed their wish to see the Sunday rest day being better protected in national legislations as well as in the future EU Working Time Direc-

tive which is currently being revised. In our societies and in our economies, where efficiency has become the ultimate criterion of valuation, Sunday rest allows the individual to be placed at the centre of society and calls attention to the fact that he is free and not the slave of work.

In view of the meeting of the European Council for Justice and Home Affairs on 27 November, the delegation of Church representatives also raised several issues related to refugee resettlement and to European Union policies regarding the return of refugees. The delegation emphasized the need for a truly common EU policy on migration and asylum, which protects the human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, and which regards integration as a two-way process, involving both migrants and host communities.

Then the COMECE and the CEC representatives and the Church representatives in France expressed to the French EU-Presidency their deep concern about the rights of minorities around the world, especially where Christian minorities are subjected to persecution. They called on the EU Member States and the EU Institutions to make respect for religious freedom, which is a fundamental right, a major plank of their Foreign Policy.

The Church representatives also discussed the dramatic situation of Iraqi Christians whose extinction would signify a major injustice. It would mean that the dialogue between

cultures is no longer possible and the demands of ethnic and religious communities prevail over the universality of human rights.

Finally the representatives also discussed global issues like climate change and EU-Africa relations. They recalled the specific contribution Churches and Christians could bring in helping to address these challenges, through their reflections, examples and local initiatives.

## 7.3 | Dialogue Seminars with the European Commission

Dialogue Seminars have a longstanding tradition in the cooperation between the European Commission and the Churches in Europe. Since they started in the early 1990s they have proved to be a significant discussion forum for matters of common concern. They represent an important element in the regular and transparent dialogue between the European institutions and the Churches in Europe.

### 7.3.1 | Dialogue Seminar on “Flexicurity from the standpoint of values”

28 February 2008

On the eve of the meeting of the Council of the European Union on Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs, representatives and experts of the Churches in Europe discussed with the European institutions the modernisation of European employment policies, which shall provide a mutually supportive combination of security and flexibility, called “flexicurity”. The Churches stressed the need for a much broader approach in European employment policies.

Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities explained that flexicurity gives opportunity to protect workers on the labour market, to promote equal work opportunities between men and women, strengthening family life and fighting against poverty. Commissioner Špidla underlined that the main aim of flexicurity is not merely to protect workers against precarious situations but to protect human dignity. Flexicurity is focused more on society than on the labour market. This concept, as highlighted by Stefan Lunte, Assistant General Secretary of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community, is rooted in the tradition of the Churches. In the socio-political arena it should be measured by the degree of progress made for the weakest participants in the labour market.

Commissioner for Education and Culture, Ján Figel, stressed that education can contribute to make the flexicurity initiative successful in all the countries and regions of the EU.

Professor Gerhard Wegner, director of the Social Sciences Institute of the Evangelical Church in Germany, in the Dialogue Seminar explained that the institutions of society (so-

cial security offices, job centres, youth departments etc.) must propose stronger empowerment approaches in order to improve opportunities for people to participate in society, particularly in the labour market.

Bishop Ludwig Schwarz SDB of Linz launched an appeal to protect the free Sunday as a cultural heritage of Europe and underlined that the human being is not only created as an individual but also open to community. *“Only free time shared with others gives human beings in their relationships to others its full dignity.”*

MEP Jacek Protasiewicz expressed the expectations that churches help people find their way in the modernised labour market and to face its changes (the importance of life long learning). He also said that it is important to strengthen the ethical dimension of the relations between employees and employers.

Ms. Bozica Matic from the Permanent Representation of the Slovenia to the EU said that it is a time to start to implement flexicurity and to put it into practice together with all stakeholders including churches and religious communities.

The dialogue between Churches and EU Institutions took place in the presence of the social partners, represented by Bussineseuropa (UNICE) and European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) who offered their opinion as to how to implement the concept of flexicurity.

### 7.3.2 | Dialogue Seminar on Education and Migration

15 December 2008

Churches and the European Commission discussed challenges facing the educational systems in an intercultural context

Education is a major factor for integrating migrants in Europe. Current projects and good practises need to be shared and their implementation financially supported. This is the conclusion of the Dialogue Seminar, which took place on 15 December 2008. It was jointly organised by the European Commission, CSC-CEC and COMECE. It brought together Commission officials, European experts on education from Churches, religious organisations and the academic world.

The EU has a significant role in the field of education in supporting good practises and so influencing education policies in the Member States. This Dialogue Seminar organised in the context of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008, was dedicated to “Quality education in an intercultural environment”. Participants discussed the benefits of cultural diversity and the challenges for educational systems in the multicultural society.

Education is one of the key factors in the process of integration. Many schools in Europe are nowadays confronted with the phenomenon of ‘White flight’. ‘White flight’ occurs when

the parents from the indigenous population remove their children from schools where the majority of the pupils come from a migration background. Educational institutions must counter this phenomenon and become safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces of learning. The Seminar explored the ways church and non-church bodies play an active role in promoting this approach. The following examples were explored: innovative architecture, the value of participation of family and community members in the school life, interactive classrooms and tutored library. At the same time, the Seminar underlined the primary role of parents in educating their children.

European Commissioner for Education Ján Figel underlined the religious component of the intercultural dialogue and called for the continuation of the dialogue beyond the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008. A representative of the Directorate General of Education and Culture stressed the importance of continuing to share best practises. She welcomed inputs by the Churches and the religious communities to the current Commission’s consultation on Migration and Education. The Churches and Commission’s representatives also agreed on the necessity to keep the issue of education as a permanent point on the agenda of the Church and Commission institutional Dialogue.



## 8 | PUBLICATIONS

### 8.1 | Climate Change

In order to contribute to the debate on Climate Change, the COMECE Bishops officially decided on 23 November 2007 to set up an ad hoc Working group on “*EU Climate Change Policies and Christian Lifestyle*”. The Working group, which consists of 10 European personalities from Politics and Science, submitted its report to the COMECE Bishops on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly in November 2008.

#### Presentation of the Expert group report on Climate change

The expert group set up by COMECE last January and chaired by the former EU-Commissioner Prof. Franz Fischler published on 29 October 2008 its report to the Member Bishops of COMECE. The document “*A Christian View on Climate Change*” underlines the huge challenge that climate change represents for mankind. It calls on European leaders to anchor their climate change policies in ethical thinking, based on inter-generational justice and solidarity towards countries of the South. The experts also call on the Church and on Christians to show an example by adopting lifestyles based on moderation.

It must be recognised that the fight against climate change is first of all a problem of public ethos. It will be hard to solve without challenging certain ways of organising society, without questioning the ways we live together and the value system of civil society. In order to convince citizens to fundamentally change their way of thinking and living, political leaders should turn to profound ethical reflection and debate. According to the report, this reflection could be based on Christian theology which has developed interesting ideas on this topic. Above all, the values and principles of the social teaching of the Church - global justice, disposition towards the weakest, subsidiarity, solidarity and responsibility for the common good - could allow climate change policies to be assessed.

The authors of the report emphasise the fact that climate

change is especially an issue of intra- and inter-generational justice. Consequently, they call on the European Union to take up the leadership and to raise its voice for the developing countries and for future generations who bear or will bear the highest burden of climate change. The authors underline the fact that the EU bears a special responsibility for combating climate change, in view of its technological and financial means and its experience with cooperative action. The EU should show the example and convince all actors concerned of the necessity of protecting the Earth's climate.

The report recalls that climate change is but one symptom of an unsustainable way of life, modes of production and patterns of consumption that have evolved in the industrialised world but which are not sustainable in future. It calls on citizens to question their own lifestyles that are too dependent on material goods and to base them much more on cultural and relational goods. In fact, our lifestyles should be based on voluntary ‘*moderation*’, a central virtue that should be understood as having the aim, not of diminishing, but rather of supporting a higher quality of life and a greater reason to rejoice. The Catholic Church and all Christians are best placed to propagate such changes in lifestyles, through concrete proposals and by their modest examples.

### 8.2 | Science / Bioethics

The COMECE Secretariat published 16 Opinion statements from its Bioethics Reflection Group in French and in English. The aim of this publication is to encourage interest in bioethical issues and to promote an open dialogue between Church, politics, science and economics.

The Bioethics Reflection Group of the COMECE Secretariat produced, over a period of 12 years, 16 Opinion statements on a wide range of bioethical issues. The most recent Opinions deal with ethical aspects of organ donation, anthropological and ethical issues related to the creation of human-animal mixed organisms, ethical aspects of nanomedicine and patentability of human stem cells. They also dealt with living wills (end-of-life arrangements) and euthanasia, genetic testing, biomedical research in developing countries, cloning, embryonic stem cell and embryo research.

In recent years bioethical topics have gained growing importance in various EU policies. For instance, an EU directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions (‘*Biopatent Directive*’) led to the question as to whether or not human embryonic stem-cell lines and human genes can be patented. With regard to European research funding under the EU Research Framework Programmes the question of whether or not the EU would fund research on human cloning and the use of human embryonic stem cells have led to deeply contro-



Prof. Jean-Pascal van Ypersele

versal discussions in all EU institutions.

Currently, the European Commission is currently working on a proposal for a directive on organ donations for transplant purposes. Here too, fundamental ethical questions are involved, particularly with respect to the free will of donors and the principle of non-commercialisation of the human body and its parts.

In view of the significance of bioethical issues for EU policies, the Bioethics Reflection Group was founded in 1996 by COMECE. Its aim is to examine bioethical issues in terms of their implications for the EU and its institutions and, at the same time, to inform the COMECE Bishops and their Bishops' Conferences about these issues. Its members represent a range of disciplines in addition to theology, ethics and philosophy: notably law, medicine and pharmacology.

### 8.3 | "Europe Infos"

*Europe Infos*, a monthly review edited by COMECE and OCIFE, is published in English, French and German. In addition to the 11 annual issues, a special No. 100 issue was published in January 2008. With the publication of *Europe Infos* No. 100 the COMECE Secretariat and the Jesuit office OCIFE have completed more than nine years of cooperation in communicating developments in European policy. *Europe Infos* aims to make the meaning and purpose of the European project better known to citizens, and especially to the local churches.

Leather-bound issues of the following publications are now available for consultation in English, French and German at the offices of the COMECE Secretariat:

- the SIPECA newsletter 1977-1981 (SIPECA was the predecessor of COMECE)
- »*l'Europe au fil des jours*» (1982-1996) was the predecessor publication before «*Europe Infos*»
- »*Europe Infos*» (1997-today)



# 9 | LIST OF ACTIVITIES 2008

## 9.1 | Consultations

The European Commission has a long tradition of consulting interested parties from outside when formulating its policies. It incorporates external consultation into the development of almost all its policy areas. Depending on the issues at stake, consultation is intended to provide opportunities for input from representatives of regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, the individual citizens concerned, academics and technical experts. In this context, the COMECE Secretariat itself participates or encourages the COMECE Member Bishops' Conferences to participate in the Consultations on issues which are of interest to Churches and Church-organisations. In 2008, COMECE took part in following consultations:

*Contribution of the COMECE Secretariat to Consultation launched by the European Commission on Social reality in Europe*  
15.02.08 / European Commission

*Contribution of the COMECE Secretariat to Consultation launched by the European Commission in view of the 2008/2009 Budget review [SEC (2007) 1188 final]*  
08.04.08 / European Commission

*Contribution of the COMECE Secretariat to Consultation launched by the European Commission concerning review of existing legislation on VAT reduced rates (TAXUD/D1 D/24232)*  
14.05.08 / European Commission

*Contribution of the COMECE Secretariat to Consultation launched by the Fundamental rights Agency of the EU concerning the Agency's Annual Work Programme for 2009*  
20.08.08 / Fundamental Rights Agency of the EU

*Contribution of the COMECE Secretariat to Consultation launched by the Fundamental rights Agency of the EU concerning the Agency's Annual Activity Report for 2008*  
20.08.08 / Fundamental Rights Agency of the EU

*Contribution of the Secretariat of COMECE to the consultation launched by the European Commission "Towards a comprehensive and ambitious post-2012 climate change agreement" »*  
10.10.08 / European Commission

## 9.2 | Conferences (co-)organised by COMECE

Reflection meeting: A «*European Social week*» - Proposal in view of a European event to reflect on EU policy in the light of the Catholic Social Teaching

30-31.01.08 / COMECE, Brussels

Preparatory meeting to the day of prayer and reflection for Young EU civil servants in Kranenburg (Germany)

13.02.08 / COMECE, Brussels

Debriefing of the «*Education, Youth and Culture*» Council meeting (14.02.08)

15.02.08 / COMECE, Brussels

Meeting of CCME, CEC, Caritas Europa and COMECE with the President of the European Parliament on the proposal «*Directive on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals*»

20.02.08 / European Parliament (Strasbourg)

Dialogue Seminar on «*Flexicurity from the standpoint of values*» co-organised by the European Commission, the CES-CEC and COMECE

28.02.08 / European Commission

International Summer School Seggauberg 2008 : «*US Europe – Towards a Multicultural Continent*» co-organised by the University of Graz, COMECE and the Diocese of Graz-Sekau

28.06 - 12.07.08 / Seggauberg, Austria

Day of reflection and Prayer for Young EU civil servants

20.09.08 / Kranenburg, Germany

Presentation of the Work Programme of the European Commission by Mr Pascal Leardini, European Commission

04.12.08 / COMECE, Brussels

Evening debate with H.E Bishop Robert Zollitsch, President of the German Bishops' Conference

10.12.08 / COMECE, Brussels

Dialogue Seminar on «*Education and Migration*» co-organised by the European Commission, the CES-CEC and COMECE

15.12.08 / European Commission

**Series of Seminars on « Islam, Christianity and Europe »  
co-organised by COMECE, CES-CEC and KAS**

1. “*Intercultural Dialogue: Response to which problems? Christian and Muslim perspectives*”

17.04.08 / European Parliament

2. “*Visibility of religion in the European public space: the question of worship places and religious symbols in clothing*”

29.05.08 / European Parliament

3. ‘*Christian Europe’ and Islam in Europe*

03.07.08 / European Parliament

4. “*The external relations of the European Union with Muslim countries and international responsibility of religious communities*”

11.09.08 / European Parliament

## 9.3 | Conferences attended by COMECE in Brussels and all over Europe

European Parliament (Brussels, Strasbourg)	21
European Commission	2
Others, Belgium	51
Germany	8
France	4
United Kingdom	4
Italy	4
Austria	2
Sweden	1
Hungary	1
Ireland	1
Netherlands	1

## 9.4 | Other Contributions

Joint letter of COMECE, Caritas Europa, CCME and CEC in view of the vote in the European parliament on the proposal « *Directive on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals* »

30.05.08 / European Parliament

## 9.5 | Visitor Groups

The COMECE Secretariat receives every year a number of delegations and visitor groups from the different EU Members States but also from further afield, in order to inform and raise awareness among the Church community about questions of special common interest dealt with by the different institutions of the EU. The COMECE Secretariat organises visits for Church-linked groups to the EU institutions. In 2008, visitors came from the following countries:

- |           |            |          |
|-----------|------------|----------|
| - Austria | - Poland   | - Syria  |
| - England | - Romania  | - Turkey |
| - France  | - Slovakia | - Wales  |
| - Germany | - Sweden   |          |



# 10 | GENERAL INFORMATION

## 10.1 | Members

**Most Rev. Adrianus van Luyn**  
Bishop of Rotterdam (Netherlands)  
President of COMECE

**Most Rev. Diarmuid Martin**  
Archbishop of Dublin (Ireland)  
Vice-President of COMECE

**Most Rev. Piotr Jarecki**  
Auxiliary Bishop of Warsaw (Poland)  
Vice-President of COMECE

**Most Rev. Virgil Bercea**  
Bishop of Oradea Mare/Gran  
Varadino (Romania)

**Most Rev. Mario Grech**  
Bishop of Gozo (Malta)

**Most Rev. Vaclav Maly**  
Auxiliary Bishop of Prague  
(Czech Republic)

**Most Rev. Frantisek Rábek**  
Military Bishop (Slovakia)

**Most Rev. Ferenc Cserháti**  
Auxiliary Bishop Esztergom-Bu-  
dapest (Hungary)

**Most Rev. Anton Justs**  
Bishop of Jēgļava (Latvia)

**Most Rev. Reinhard Marx**  
Archbishop of Munich and Frei-  
sing (Germany)

**Most Rev. Anton Stres**  
Bishop of Celje (Slovenia)

**Most Rev. Jozef De Kesel**  
Auxiliary Bishop of Brussels  
(Belgium)

**Most Rev. Egon Kapellari**  
Bishop of Graz-Seckau  
(Austria)

**Most Rev. Giuseppe Merisi**  
Bishop of Lodi (Italy)

**Most Rev. José Amândio  
Tomás**  
Coadjutor Bishop of Vila Real  
(Portugal)

**Most Rev. Nikólaos Fóscolos**  
Archbishop of Athens (Greece)

**Most Rev. William Kenney**  
Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham  
(England and Wales)

**Most Rev. Peter A. Moran**  
Bishop of Aberdeen (Scotland)

**Most Rev. Fernand Franck**  
Archbishop of the Grand  
Duchy of Luxemburg

**Most Rev. Czeslaw Kozon**  
Bishop of Copenhagen  
(Scandinavia)

**Most Rev. Rimantas Norvila**  
Bishop of Vilkaviškis  
(Lithuania)

**Most Rev. Adolfo Gonzalez  
Montes**  
Bishop of Almeria (Spain)

**Most Rev. Christian Kratz**  
Auxiliary Bishop of Strasburg  
(France)

**Most Rev. Christo Proykov**  
Apostolic Exarch of Sofia  
President of the Bishops'  
Conference (Bulgaria)

## 10.2 | COMECE Secretariat

**Mgr. Noël Treanor**  
General Secretary until 30.6.2008

**Fr Piotr Mazurkiewicz**  
General Secretary from 13.11.2008

**Stefan Lunte**  
Deputy General Secretary  
General Secretary *ad interim*  
(1.7-12.11.2008)  
Advisor  
Economic and social affairs  
Institutional issues

**Michael Kuhn**  
Deputy General Secretary *ad interim*  
(1.7-12.11.2008)  
Seconded by the Austrian Bishops'  
Conference  
Advisor  
Education, Culture and Youth policy

**Alessandro Calcagno**  
Seconded by the Italian Bishops'  
Conference  
Legal advisor Migration and Asylum

**Vincent Legrand**  
Advisor  
Intercultural/ Interreligious Affairs  
(Christian-Muslim Dialogue)

**Joanna Lopatowska**  
Legal advisor  
Fundamental Rights

**Thomas Pickartz**  
Legal advisor  
Institutional affairs  
Environmental and social issues

**Katharina Schauer**  
Legal advisor  
Bioethical issues

**Johanna Touzel**  
Spokesperson  
Press officer

**Maud Oger**  
Secretariat

Administration  
**Agnès Paillard** (voluntary)  
**Aimery de Véric** from 5.11.2008

The Secretariat was assisted in the course  
of the year by voluntary interns:

**Karin Hanstein**  
(D/Student/ 01.12.2007-31.01.2008)

**Christina Gerlach**  
(D/Student/ 18.02-11.04.2008)

**Amelie Vesper**  
(D/pupil/ 14.04-26.06.2008)

**Ferdinand Werhahn**  
(D/Pupil/01.11-22.12.2008)





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