



Commission des Episcopats de la Communauté Européenne
Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community
Kommission der Bischofskonferenzen der Europäischen Gemeinschaft

42, rue Stévin
B – 1000 Bruxelles
Tél. + 32 (0)2 235 05 10
Fax + 32 (0)2 230 33 34
comece@comece.org

THE FUTURE OF EUROPE POLITICAL COMMITMENT, VALUES, AND RELIGION

*Contribution of the COMECE secretariat to the
Debate on the Future of the European Union in the European Convention*

1. Never before in the history of the European Union has the project of rethinking its objectives, responsibilities, structures, and the principles on which it is constructed been taken up so visibly and systematically. The establishment of the European Convention offers a unique opportunity for citizens and the variety of institutions, associations and communities in both the Member and Candidate States to be directly involved in the building of the future of Europe.
2. The success of the European Convention's proposals will be determined by their capacity to enhance the European Union's contribution to peace and prosperity in Europe and fulfil its responsibility for promoting development, justice and freedom elsewhere in the world. They will have to ensure balance and coherence between European institutions, national and local governments in their shared service for the common good.
3. The Convention's success will depend on the perception, by its citizens, of the Union as a community of values, inviting their full participation and contribution at all levels. If citizens are to feel that they have a stake, they must have trust: trust in the values and objectives of European integration, trust in the procedures of the European institutions, trust in the people responsible for carrying them out. The work of the Convention should therefore be guided by the same principles as those that guide the process of European integration: the centrality of the human being, solidarity, subsidiarity and transparent democracy.

The Secretariat of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) wishes to offer an initial contribution to the debate of the Convention.

Human Dignity and Fundamental Rights

4. The acknowledgement and protection of human rights is a major achievement of modern constitutionalism, supported and promoted by the social teaching of the Catholic Church. The proclamation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union in

December 2000 is a remarkable achievement. The Charter starts from the concept of human dignity and places the human person at the centre of the Union's action, and to this extent is inspired by the Judeo-Christian image of humankind. Although the COMECE Secretariat has repeatedly pointed out some important lacunae and ambiguities in the text of the Charter, especially with regard to cloning, marriage and family, religious liberty, education and social rights¹, it recognises that its inclusion is appropriate in a constitutional framework.

5. The values and presuppositions on which a community is based transcend particular decisions of policy and law. They are the source from which fundamental rights emanate. A constitutional text aiming to engage the Union's citizens should also recognise the totality of sources from which citizens draw these values².

In order therefore to facilitate citizens' identification with the values of the European Union, and to acknowledge that public power is not absolute, the COMECE secretariat recommends that a future Constitutional Treaty of the European Union should recognise the openness and ultimate otherness associated with the name of God. An inclusive reference to the Transcendent provides a guarantee for the freedom of the human person.

6. Fundamental guarantees not only need appropriate legal status, they also need to be formulated and interpreted in a way that responds to real issues and processes. This is also true with respect to freedom of religion and belief. EU legislation and policy affect not only the individual but also structures and organisations to which individuals choose to belong. In order to ensure fully the free enjoyment of liberties, fundamental rights need to be tailored to take this into account. This would complement the predominantly individualist approach of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The COMECE secretariat stresses the importance of the recognition of fundamental rights in a future Constitutional Treaty, including religious freedom in its individual, collective and institutional dimensions. These dimensions of religious freedom should be recognised not only as part of the common constitutional traditions of Member States, but also at the EU level.

Solidarity and the Common Good

7. European integration is more than just an economic and political option: it is a synonym for sustainable peace – both inner peace resulting from new forms of social and political co-operation, and external peace, through the EU's contribution to global development and resolving conflict.
8. The achievements of European integration are due to the originality of its institutional basis, i.e. the Community method and the delicate balance of powers it ensures between its institutions and its Member States. Distinct from both pure intergovernmentalism and

¹ Cf. inter alia: Observations of the COMECE Secretariat on the draft Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 18 October 2000, available at the COMECE Secretariat.

² A provision worth noting in this regard is the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, which includes “both those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good and beauty, as well as those not sharing such faith but respecting those universal values as arising from other sources”.

full integration, the Community method is essential to safeguard the general interest of the Union as a whole. It is hard to imagine how this should be achieved without genuinely European institutions, mandated directly or indirectly by democratic decision. The key role of the European Commission must be maintained. The time has come to provide the European Parliament, on the one hand, with full democratic legitimacy, on the other hand, with competences in areas such as Justice and Home Affairs, the Common Agricultural Policy and the European Development Fund. A constitutional text should place the question of inequality between the twenty-five and more future Member States of the Union among the priorities for common action for the future.

9. Recent dramatic world events demonstrate the importance of a united Europe, able to speak with one voice on the world stage and to contribute to the global common good by drawing on its experience of solving problems through dialogue, co-operation, solidarity and the promotion of human rights, rather than by the use of force. Acting together could also assist in finding a community approach to the difficult question of arms production and export.

The European Union's commitment to serve the common good ad intra and ad extra requires a policy of solidarity. The COMECE secretariat proposes to integrate the pursuance of the common good into a future Constitutional Treaty of the European Union as one of its core principles and objectives. The Community method must be maintained and developed in order to promote the common and shared good of all Member States, both large and small.

Subsidiarity and Participation

10. Political leadership is increasingly confronted with new challenges. The idea that governance takes the form of vertical superimposition of different levels of power has never been inherent to the framework of the European Union. Its unique form of organisation with a system of attributive competences, as well as the community method, precludes such an approach. The principle of subsidiarity leads to a much more sophisticated understanding of the allocation and exercise of power.
11. At the same time, it is clear that societal challenges cannot be solved through the mere intervention of political institutions. Answers can be found by seeking partnerships with or consultation of various sectors of society. Intermediate organisations, legitimately anchored in society, play a supportive role in this respect. Political leadership should recognise this role, and build upon the strength of available experience and knowledge of such sectors. The subsidiarity principle applies – in a horizontal way – to every aspect of society. It is based on the recognition of the dignity of the human person and her/his relationships, starting from the family as the basic element of society.

The COMECE secretariat stresses the importance of the subsidiarity principle, both in its vertical and in its horizontal dimensions and supports the explicit recognition of this principle in both these dimensions in a future Constitutional Treaty.

Churches and the European Union – Sharing responsibility

12. As the EU integrates, enlarges and consolidates its role as a world actor, its responsibilities become more profound and their ethical content more visible. In an era of rapid technological and scientific progress, it will be necessary to reach beyond classic political approaches to more fundamental notions and values, such as human dignity, solidarity, family life, or stewardship of the earth. Over the centuries, religious communities have built a tradition of fostering the values that are fundamental to the human condition and of articulating these values in ever-changing times. Religions provide the foundation and orientation that gives meaning to life. They have the potential to inspire innovation in society and governance.
13. As well as core policy issues, culture and identity are of paramount importance in the process of European integration. Religious, spiritual, and intellectual movements and traditions have been formative for our awareness of culture and identity today. They connect people through the centuries. As a source of inspiration they are a living heritage to be carried on into the future.
14. Churches and religious communities represent, safeguard, and foster fundamental aspects of the spiritual and religious foundation of Europe. They are committed to serve society – inter alia, in the fields of education, culture, media and social work – and they play an important role in promoting mutual respect, participation, citizenship, dialogue and reconciliation between the peoples of Europe, East and West. They emphasise Europe’s responsibility not just for its immediate neighbours, but for the whole of the human family.

The COMECE secretariat stresses the importance of recognising the great religious, spiritual, and intellectual movements and traditions as a living heritage significant for our times and for the future of Europe. Among these, the specific contribution of Churches and religious communities should be acknowledged in a future Constitutional Treaty of the European Union. The treaty should also provide for the possibility of a structured dialogue between the European institutions and Churches and religious communities.

15. Each Member State of the EU has developed a constitutional expression of the relationship between the religious order and the political order, between Church and State. These relationships reflect fundamental choices and social, demographic, and historical circumstances. They evolve over time and are part of Member States’ national identity. The respect of the fundamental nature of these relationships by the EU is acknowledged in Declaration N° 11 annexed to the Final Act of the Treaty of Amsterdam, which also reflects the EU’s respect for the internal organisation of Churches and religious communities.

A future Constitutional Treaty of the European Union should incorporate Declaration N° 11 annexed to the Final Act of the Treaty of Amsterdam, expressing its respect for the status of Churches and religious communities as recognised by every Member State.

Conclusion

16. The Catholic Church has accompanied and supported the process of European integration since its inception, for the purpose of the European Union “is first and foremost to serve the common good of all in order to guarantee justice and harmony”³. The values and principles that have guided the integration process, such as human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity, are recognised and promoted by the social teaching of the Church.
17. With this initial document and the proposals contained in it, the Secretariat of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community offers its first contribution to the Convention. It does so in the hope that the work of the Convention will result in a balanced set of proposals capable of guiding the European Union; a Union not merely based on realities and givens of the past, but on the needs for governance of the future.

Brussels, 21 May 2002

³ Pope John Paul II in a speech to a group of European parliamentarians, 10 November 1983.