



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
E-mail: comece@comece.org

Declaration of the Bishops of COMECE

with regard to a

Common Asylum and Immigration Policy of the European Union

The Bishops of COMECE recall that mobility, in varying forms and degrees, has always been a characteristic of human existence and is an increasingly important element of modern life. It affects many persons directly and some indirectly. The convergence of races, civilisations and cultures in one juridical and social order challenges us to find new ways of living together. Frontiers tend to disappear, distances are shortened, the repercussions of regional upheavals can be felt world-wide. On the one hand, these circumstances have increased the awareness of the growing inequality in our world. On the other hand, the reality of global interdependence makes it easier to appreciate the common destiny of the entire human family¹.

Pope John Paul II said in his Message for World Peace Day 2001 that “the prime value which must be ever more widely inculcated is that of solidarity. A society depends on the basic relations between people in ever widening circles - from the family to other intermediary social groups, to civil society as a whole and to the national community”. Practising the virtue of solidarity towards those who come to Europe in search of a better life is a challenge for all of us, as Christians and as Europeans.

The Bishops of COMECE take note of the important debate on a future Asylum and Immigration Policy of the European Union to which the European Commission has committed itself. These issues pose a number of complex challenges, which need to be distinguished and addressed separately.

In this context, we should like to stress the European Union's responsibility in the world. We call for the respect of the Right to Asylum as provided for by the UN 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. This should be ensured by a just processing of refugees' access to the European Union Asylum system. Refugees and Asylum-seekers should be received in conditions which guarantee the respect for

¹ Message of the Holy Father for World Peace Day, 1 January 2001, N° 17.

their human dignity, and their claims should be assessed according to procedures that meet the highest standards.

With regard to immigration, we especially encourage the European Commission in its initiative to strengthen co-operation with the countries of origin and thereby to combat the root causes of emigration, which are often detrimental to the society of the countries of origin. In this context we recall the Holy Father's Message for the World Day for Migration: "The Church recognises this right [to emigrate] in every human person, in its dual aspect of the possibility to leave one's country and the possibility to enter another country to look for better conditions of life. Certainly, the exercise of such a right is to be regulated, because practising it indiscriminately may do harm and be detrimental to the common good of the community that receives the migrant. Before the manifold interests that are interwoven side by side with the laws of the individual countries, it is necessary to have international norms that are capable of regulating everyone's rights, so as to prevent unilateral decisions that are harmful to the weakest"².

We are extremely concerned about the situations of people with irregular status, many of whom are victims of exploitation that denies their human dignity. We are also concerned about those who, although in regular situations, cannot live with their families. In her pastoral activity, the Church tries to take these serious problems constantly into consideration. A person who exercises his or her right to search for better living conditions by legitimate means should not be considered as a criminal simply for doing so.

Although the situations regarding these issues differ significantly in the Member States, we believe that these questions cannot be solved without a common policy within the Union. We call on the Governments of the Member States of the European Union to recognise their mutual interdependence and to work for the development of common European rules to the benefit of both the migrants and the host society.

Finally, we commit ourselves to play our part in the ongoing discussion: We encourage the COMECE Working Group on Migration to continue its active engagement in accompanying the preparatory process for the review of a truly Common European Asylum and Immigration Policy and to prepare a more detailed contribution to the debate.

Rome, 30 March 2001

² Message of Pope John Paul II for the World Day of Migration, 2 February 2001, N° 3.

The Bishops of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community:

Mgr Josef Homeyer, Bishop of Hildesheim (Germany) – President of COMECE

Mgr Teodoro De Faria, Bishop of Funchal (Portugal)

Mgr Luk De Hovre, Auxiliary Bishop of Mechelen-Brussels (Belgium)

Mgr Joseph Duffy, Bishop of Clogher (Ireland)

Mgr Fernand Franck, Archbishop of Luxembourg

Mgr Crispian Hollis, Bishop of Portsmouth (England and Wales)

Mgr Egon Kapellari, Bishop of Graz-Seckau (Austria)

Mgr William Kenney, Auxiliary Bishop of Stockholm (Sweden)

Mgr John Mone, Bishop of Paisley (Scotland)

Mgr Attilio Nicora, Italian Bishops' Conference

Mgr Hippolyte Simon, Bishop of Clermont (France)

Mgr Adrianus van Luyn, Bishop of Rotterdam (Netherlands)

Mgr Antonios Varthalitis, Archbishop of Corfu (Greece)

Mgr Elias Yanes Alvarez, Archbishop of Saragossa (Spain)