



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

Creating a framework for a just society in Europe

Statement of the COMECE Executive Committee in view of 9 May 2006

Brussels, 5 May 2006

Following the results of the referendums on the EU Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands, the European Council announced in June 2005 a *Time for reflection* on the future of Europe. With its *Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate* of October 2005, the European Commission wants to stimulate the debate, especially in the Member States and also at the level of the EU institutions. The Austrian Council Presidency will take stock in this regard during the European Council in June 2006.

We welcome the reflection on the future of Europe and the positive elements of Plan D. However, in view of the indifference shown by many citizens and politicians towards the European Union, the Commission's proposals are not sufficient to actually revive the debate on the future of Europe. We call on those responsible in the Member States and the European institutions to turn their attention to the problems of Europe with renewed energy and to establish a workable framework for the European Union in order to facilitate the building of a more just society.

- The debate on the future of Europe must focus on the human being in its inalienable dignity. European integration may never be an end in itself; it must, rather, be oriented towards the hopes and concerns of the people, serve the common European good and fulfil Europe's responsibility for the world.
- The debate on the future of Europe must concern itself with the heritage, values and objectives of the European Union in order to strengthen the sense of belonging on the part of Europe's citizens. With corresponding regard for other convictions and beliefs, greater account must be taken of the Christian faith and the ethical convictions of many people in Europe.
- Communication campaigns for limited periods are not enough to gain the trust and confidence of Europe's citizens. It is vital to concentrate on shaping better and more democratic structures that reinforce the principle of subsidiarity and facilitate improved participation of the people including the Churches and all actors in civil society in the political process of European integration.
- To promote the economic and social development of the European Union, the EU institutions have to carry out urgently needed reforms, together with the Member States. The Lisbon Strategy for Employment and Growth is the recognised framework in this regard. However, the economic policy of the EU institutions and the Member States should also strengthen family friendly policies and promote solidarity with the poor in both Europe and the world. Instead of national solutions, a European framework has to be created to curb the risks of globalisation and enable all the people across the world to take advantage of the new opportunities.

- Europe bears responsibility for peace and development in the world. In order to fulfil this responsibility in the areas of foreign, security and development policy, the European Union must learn more and more to speak with one voice and act as a unified force. Accordingly the present political and legal framework of the European Union needs to be developed further.

In view of these major challenges, the European Union must reform its current treaties. We are convinced that the necessary reforms can be achieved through the Constitutional Treaty. The debate on the future of Europe should therefore concentrate on the Constitutional Treaty so as to facilitate ratification of the treaty in all the Member States and establish a uniform political and legal framework for the European Union. In this respect account must be taken of the people's concerns regarding the present wording, as expressed in a number of Member States and in so far as these concerns are legitimate. In doing so, it will be recognised that the Constitutional Treaty has been ratified by 14 Member States which represent the majority of people in the European Union.

Pope Benedict XVI asserted in his Encyclical letter *Deus caritas est: A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply.*¹ The debate on the future of Europe must be oriented towards the question of how the European Union can make a society possible which caters for the hopes and concerns of the people in Europe while fulfilling its responsibility to the world. The Church is prepared to make its special contribution to a just society in Europe. It is, however, the citizens and, in particular, the politicians that bear the responsibility for building such a society. We therefore encourage all citizens and politicians to face up to this responsibility with renewed energy and to advance the building of a just society in Europe.

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¹ Encyclical letter *Deus caritas est* from Pope Benedict XVI, no. 28 a).