



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

COMECE

ANNUAL REPORT

1994

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SECTION I

INTERNAL PLANNING

1.1. INTERNAL MEETINGS

Data: Regular meetings took place between the President, the Secretary General and P.H. Langendôrfner in Hildesheim or Brussels to update and exchange information, to organise the ongoing work of the secretariat, to consider, plan and organise initiatives to be undertaken in the light of the evolution of EU policy.

An agenda was prepared for each meeting. The meetings took place on the following dates:

12.01.'94
28.02.'94
18.04.'94
01.06.'94
04.07.'94
11.07.'94
26.09.'94
27.10.'94

OBSERATION

These meetings, requiring an investment of time especially on the part of the President, have proved to be useful and productive: useful for updating and in permitting an exchange of information, productive in generating ideas for various initiatives.

1.2. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Two meetings were held in the course of the year. For practical reasons arising from the presence of the two Vice-Presidents, Mgr. F. Franck and Mgr. E. Yanes, in Simmern, Germany, for the plenary of the CCEE, the Spring meeting of the COMECE Executive took place on January 27 in Berg Moriah, Simmern.

A second meeting of the Executive committee, hosted by Mgr. E. Yanes in Zaragoza, Spain, took place on July 21-22. For various reasons it was not possible to hold the meeting planned for Brussels, September 26.

OBSERVATION

The Simmern meeting devoted its attention chiefly to (i) preparation of the agenda for the COMECE Spring 1994 plenary, (ii) the draft of a COMECE statement to mark the elections to the European Parliament in June 1994, (iii) the proposed text for article 5 of the new CCEE statutes, which sets out the CCEE-COMECE relationship, (iv) matters related to the COMECE secretariat, (v) COMECE participation in an ecumenical prayer service, proposed for July 20 in the Reformed Church of St. Paul, Strasbourg, to mark the opening of the newly elected European Parliament.

The Zaragoza meeting provided an opportunity to examine a wider panorama of issues pertinent to COMECE's work. Having noted the main developments in EU policy since the Spring COMECE plenary and having reconsidered the initiatives taken by COMECE in the same period the members devoted much time to preparing a COMECE participation in a proposed October meeting of Church leaders with the Council of Ministers. Via the EKD and EECCS offices COMECE had been invited to participate in such a meeting. Whilst discussions with the political authorities in the course of the summer signalled a readiness to offer a meeting with the Troika, conditions stipulated by EECCS and aimed at ensuring a worthwhile meeting with a ministerial presence could not be met. Hence the meeting did not take place.

The Executive meeting also reflected on the 1996 Inter-Governmental Conference with a view to assessing whether its revision of the Maastricht Treaty on European Union required any response from COMECE. In this context consideration was given also to the question of the Church-EU relationship at EU level. The participants sought to identify further responses to the Reflection Document which had been prepared for the Spring 1994 plenary. The Orthodox and Islamic elements of European identity were considered: albeit integral components of European identity, it was noted that there exists a political, religious and cultural temptation to conceive of them as non-European, and thus to foster their own sense of being outsiders. Given the implications thereof for matters such as, the evolution of a European identity and the determination of Europe's borders, this was considered to be an appropriate matter for COMECE's attention in the future. Finally some thought was given to the methods of financing the secretariat.

Among the conclusions drawn at this meeting, the following should be noted :

- 1. The Episcopal Conferences of countries having association agreements with the EU and whose applications for membership are at an advanced stage are to be invited to send an observer to the COMECE plenary meetings. It is hoped to enact this decision for the Spring meeting of 1995.*
- 2. The COMECE secretariat should examine systematically the work programmes of both the European Commission and the European Parliament. A list of priorities for COMECE should be presented at the March 1995 plenary.*
- 3. Archbishop Franck undertook to congratulate Mr. J Santer on his election as President of the Commission on behalf of COMECE and to invite him to meet the members of COMECE during their November meeting in Luxembourg.*
- 4. Reactivate a proposal that COMECE organise a colloquium on Church-EU relationship.*
- 5. In collaboration with CCEE, to avail of programme available at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, for one-day study session on defence and security issues during a forthcoming COMECE plenary.*
- 6. Initiate steps towards establishing relations with the Orthodox in respect of EU*

related issues. Any such steps will necessarily include COMECE working together with the local Roman Catholic Bishop's Conference.

- 7 *To pursue the offer to the COMECE secretariat by the Archdiocese of Luxembourg of the remunerated services of a young journalist who would assist the secretariat's work in Brussels.*

SECTION TWO

PARTICULAR INITIATIVES

2.1. SOCIAL POLICY

The Green Paper on the Future of European Social Policy was published at the end of 1993. The secretariat sent this document to the Members of COMECE and to the Social Affairs commissions of the Bishops' Conferences inviting reactions for submission to those in the Commission's Directorate General V responsible for drafting the then forthcoming White Paper on Social Policy. The responses received were duly forwarded.

Initiative and personal contacts made it possible for the secretariat to have a small delegation invited to the final consultation on the Green Book, held in Brussels May 26-27. This group consisted of Dr. J. van der Linden, Netherlands, Dr. A. Habisch, Germany, Prof. S. Marcus-Helmons, secretariat and the Secretary General.

At the behest of the President a meeting with Commissioner Flynn to make a final input to the process of consultation on the future of European social policy was organised for July 11. The President was accompanied by a small group of specialists, Dr. J. van der Linden, (NL), Dr. F. Furger (D), Ms M. Burns (IRL), P. H. Langendorfer and the Secretary General. A fruitful exchange took place. Three papers were submitted - one an assessment of the Green Paper, a second on the principle of Subsidiarity, the third on unemployment.

OBSERVATION

1. *The response level from the Social Affairs commissions to the Green Paper indicates the need to consider how best to organise response to EU issues from the national Bishops' Conferences.*
2. *The COMECE presence at the European Conference, 26-28 May 1994, was the only Church presence apart from that of Caritas Germany.*
3. *The meeting with Commissioner Flynn in July marked a further and important step in establishing formal relations with the Commission. The indications are that the visit and the input was much appreciated on the Commission side.*
4. *It is difficult to say whether these efforts achieved specific results in the final content and philosophy of the White Book on Social Policy. Participation and presence in the consultation process was in itself important. It is certain that many of our inputs corroborate the thematic approaches taken in sections A (Shared Values) and B (Guiding Principles and Objectives) of the Introduction, that specific concerns mentioned in our various submissions such as, unemployment and job creation, poverty and exclusion, the disabled and the role of the voluntary organisations in the Social dialogue, feature in the text.*

How we wish to situate ourselves with respect to the participation of catholic voluntary organisations in the October 1995 Forum (Chapter VIII, B) might indeed be

a subject for consideration with Caritas and other such groups.

2.2. AUDIOVISUAL POLICY

Adopted by the European Commission on 7 April 1994, the Green Paper on Audiovisual Policy aimed at establishing a consultation process to reach its culmination in an assize held in Brussels at the end of June. Initially places were not available at the assize for representatives of the consumer or cultural spheres, as distinct from those representing industrial interests. Hence the Secretary General decided that a commentary on the Green Paper be drafted for publication on the eve of the assize. The COMECE counsellor for Media Affairs, Fr. Nissim o.p. and members of the Media committees of the Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales and of Germany were invited to draft critical assessments of the Green Paper. On the basis of these contributions an existing draft statement prepared in the COMECE secretariat was amended, approved by the Executive committee and published on the eve of the Assize. The text was reproduced in précis form in *Agence Europe*.

Furthermore on July 11 the President, Bishop Homeyer, together with three specialists Fr. Nissim, Frau Dr. M. Hohns, (Bonn) and Dr. J. McDonnell had a successful meeting with a civil servant in D.G. X. who is responsible for this dossier.

OBSERVATION

1. *The aforementioned civil servant and his assistants were interested in the input made by COMECE and indicated their desire to continue consultations. These consultations are being pursued.*
2. *It is evident that the evolution of Commission policy in respect of information technology and especially in regard to the information society (DG. XIII in particular) will require our attention in the coming years. It is planned to establish contacts with Commission staff in this regard.*

2.3. THE COMECE STATEMENT IN RESPECT OF ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The draft of this document was reworked in the light of the comments made by the members during the Spring plenary meeting. Having been approved by the President and two Vice-Presidents, it was published on May 3, 1994. Reproduced in some catholic publications, extracts were also printed in *Agence Europe*. The text was also distributed to the Members of the European Parliament, to the Commissioners and to some civil servants of the institutions.

OBSERVATION

1. *The draft text evoked reservations on the part of some members during the Spring plenary. Efforts were made to strengthen its assertions.*
2. *It should be noted that positive responses were received from some Members of the Parliament and from some Commissioners. Likewise it was used as material for reflection in some classes in the senior cycles of the European schools in Brussels.*

Extracts have been cited on occasion - by a politician at the Katholikentag, Dresden - and in prayer/reflection groups.

3. *Thought might be given to considering if and how it might have been better used in the local Churches. Furthermore we might well consider if we had sufficient confidence in the importance of the statement, notwithstanding the inevitable and insurmountable shortcomings of such statements.*

2.4. THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS

The revision of the statutes governing the category of teacher described as, *chargé des cours*, in the European Schools necessitated vigilant action on the part of COMECE, which was assured and coordinated by Madame C. Roba. Two issues in particular required attention: (i) the textual phraseology in the new statutes which refers to the nomination of the teachers of religion in the said schools, and (ii) the incremental scale operative in determining the salaries of teachers of religion.

Several meetings, a number of them involving representatives of the Reformed and Orthodox traditions, were devoted to these issues with representatives of the Conseil Supérieur.

OBSERVATION

1. *Consistent efforts and regular contacts with key officials in the Commission enabled discussions to take place at all vital stages.*
2. *In this sphere the opinion of the secretariat was sought in advance by Commission officials.*
3. *The outcome in respect of the two above-mentioned items seems satisfactory. The dossier will require continuing, constant and vigilant attention.*
4. *A circular letter providing detailed information will be circulated in the near future.*

2.5. CHURCHES-LED ASSIZES ON UNEMPLOYMENT

Much time and effort was invested in trying to organise this event. A British member of the European Parliament suggested the idea originally. The organisers are COMECE and EECCS.

The aim of the assize is to examine the ethical dimensions of unemployment. The findings of the assizes would be published and made available to the EU and national political institutions as well as to the local Churches.

Application has been made to the European Commission for a grant of 60,000 ECU towards realising the event.

A panel of Church leaders, assisted by a team of specialists in the social teaching of the Church and economists, will interview representatives of (i) the EU institutions, (ii) the Employers' representatives, (iii) representatives of the Unions, (iv) leading Christian thinkers on the subject, and (v) representatives of the unemployed.

Because of a major financial deficit in the projected budget for the event the Secretary Generals of both COMECE and EECCS decided in April of 1994 that the project as planned had to be abandoned. Shortly afterwards Mgr. F. Grave, Auxiliary Bishop in Essen visited Brussels to meet some civil servants and to familiarise himself with the European institutions. One of his immediate concerns was to identify ways in

which the local Church in Essen might mark the European Summit, December 9, 1994. Thus the idea of holding the assizes in Essen on December 7-8 was suggested. The diocese of Essen was prepared to provide the venue, accommodation and services as well as some financial assistance. The Protestant Churches in the Rhineland would probably have done so also.

Alas two factors frustrated the planning yet again. On the one hand the difficulty of having a timely response from the Commission regarding the grant of a subvention made for financial uncertainty. At the last moment it became evident that the person who was to coordinate the scientific input was not available. Regrettably the assizes had to be postponed yet again.

The possibility of organising this assizes during a part plenary of the European Parliament in Strasbourg is currently being investigated.

OBSERVATION

1. *The organisation of this event has been bedevilled continuously by the problem of costs and the difficulty of having an advance decision on financial subvention from the European Commission. The 1995 EU budgetary arrangements permitting, one would hope that a grant of 60,000 ECU would still be forthcoming from the Commission (D. G. V). Should the European Parliament provide support in the form of other facilities (eg. meeting room, interpretation), the remaining costs could be carried by the Churches.*
2. *The preparatory meetings with officials of D.G. V have indicated a growth of interest in this project.*
3. *However should it transpire that EU grant aid is not available for such a project in the future, COMECE, either with or without EECCS and other Church related groups in Brussels, would be well advised to investigate how this project might be financed and realised on the basis of Church means alone.*

2.6. CHURCH-EU RELATIONSHIP

Further to discussions with President Delors on the occasion of the visit of the Presidents of CCEE and COMECE to the European Commission on March 24, 1994, consideration has been given to the possibilities of the juridical conceptualisation and recognition in the EU treaty of the relationship of the Church to the EU.

A number of elements are to be acknowledged in respect of this theme. Firstly, the existing models of this relationship, outcomes of cultural and historical developments, are nation – and state-bound. Secondly, no reference of any kind is made to either religion or the Churches in the corpus of EC treaties, a situation which may entail problems for the future. Thirdly, in so far as the issue has been broached with officials of the EU institutions, they present the French model as normative for a pluralistic Europe. Fourthly, the process of European integration itself and the evolution of a supra-national political union pose the Church-State question anew and on a new plane. Fifthly, the revision of the Maastricht Treaty (1996) may mark a moment of opportunity in this regard.

OBSERVATION

1. *For these reasons it has been decided to reactivate the proposal to organise a COMECE sponsored conference on the Church-EU relationship in autumn 1995.*
2. *Special efforts will have to be made to invite and in so far as possible to ensure the participation of some EU civil servants, representatives of COREPER, and perhaps some government ministers with responsibility for cult.*
3. *Moral, personal and scientific support for this project and its aims in the national Bishops' Conferences, as well as cooperation with the Secretariat of State, will be of crucial importance.*

SECTION THREE

PRESIDENTIAL INITIATIVES

- 3.1. Further to the activities mentioned in Section I and II, the President of COMECE, Bishop Homeyer, also held a meeting with Mgr. Defois and Mgr. Daloz on 30-31.08.'94. to consider the possibility of organising a two-day winter academy in Vézelay. *L'Homme en question dans l'économie européenne* is the proposed theme.
- 3.2. The President also undertook a visit to Athens, 26-29 July. The trip had two main objectives:
 - (i) to visit the President of the Bishop's Conference, Mgr. Foscolos, the COMECE delegate. Mgr. Varthalitis and to discuss their collaboration with COMECE
 - (ii) to attempt to establish contact with the Greek Orthodox Church in order to ascertain its attitude to the EU and to explore possibilities for cooperation.

OBSERVATION

1. *The organisation of the Vézalay winter academy is being pursued in the hope of arranging it for autumn 1995 or Spring 1996.*
2. *The report of the President's visit to Athens has been made available to the COMECE delegates of the national Bishops' Conferences.*

SECTION IV

WORKING GROUPS, SEMINARS, LECTURES, GROUPS VISITS

- 4.1. An ad hoc working-group of lawyers from the Episcopal Conferences of Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, England and Wales, France and Austria meets twice yearly at the COMECE secretariat with the Secretary General and the COMECE legal counsellor, Professor S. Marcus-Helmons. These meetings aim to exchange information, to reflect on EU developments of legal significance for the Church and to

examine specific dossiers of legal and juridical import.

- 4.2. Together with representatives of the Nunciature, of the OCIPE Jesuit team, and the Dominican group, Espaces, members of the COMECE secretariat took part as observers in the half-yearly meetings co-organised by the Forward Planning Unit of the Commission and EECCS.
- 4.3. Seminars, study days and receptions were attended by staff members.
- 4.4. Addresses, lectures were given to numerous groups.
- 4.5. Meetings with civil servants of the EU institutions were organised for individuals working for the Church in the member states on request and in accordance with specific needs; information visits were organised for groups; and in accord with CCEE and in consultation with EECCS an information visit to the EU institutions has been negotiated for an inter-Church group from Romania.
- 4.6. In consultation with CCEE, approaches are currently being made to arrange an information visit for a group of the General Secretaries of the Bishops' Conferences of the central and eastern European countries.
- 4.7. Given the increasing volume of issues in the biomedical and biotechnical spheres being dealt with by the EU institutions, the secretariat embarked upon a consultation of a number of Church specialists in the field of bioethics as well as of competent EU personnel. The purpose of this exercise is to provide COMECE with such information as may facilitate decisions as to how best the local Churches may respond to matters arising in these spheres. Two memoranda have been prepared in this regard, one dealing with the nature of EU competence in these spheres, the other presenting the findings of the consultations.

SECTION V

REVIEW AND INFORMATION SERVICES

- 5.1. The SIPECA information service has been assured by the members of the COMECE secretariat.
- 5.2. The SIPECA review, *L'Europe au fil des jours*, is published in French, German and English.
- 5.3. Information on initiatives taken during the course of the year was communicated by circular letters, nos. 90-94.

SECTION VI

PRAYER SERVICES

- 6.1. Requests were received from staff members of the European Parliament to assist in

preparing and conducting prayer services for specific occasions.

- 6.2. Two such occasions marked by ecumenical prayer services occurred during the past year. The first, taken at the initiative of the Churches' organisations (i.e. EECCS, OCIPE and COMECE) took place in the Reformed Church of St. Paul in Strasbourg to mark the opening of the present Parliament. The second, organised together with and at the request of the EPP group, is the November prayer service for the deceased Members of Parliament.
- 6.3. Other requests received for liturgical assistance from the *Foyer Catholique* or the Institut Robert Schuman were given a positive response in so far as engagements permitted.

SECTION VII

COOPERATION WITH CCEE

- 7.1. The President of CCEE, Mgr. Vlk, and the President of COMECE, Mgr. Homeyer visited the President of the European Commission, Mr. J. Delors on March 24 1994. They were accompanied by the General Secretaries of CCEE and of COMECE, by P. Dr. T. Fitych and P. Dr. H. Langendôrfer. The meeting was arranged at the request of the COMECE secretariat.
- 7.2. The meeting of the General Secretaries of the European Bishops' Conferences, organised by CCEE and held in Sigüenza, Spain May 16-19, was addressed by the Secretary General of COMECE
- 7.3. The General Secretaries of CCEE and COMECE visited the Council of Europe on 7 October. An official of the Council of Europe proposed an annual meeting to exchange information between CCEE and COMECE and the Council of Europe.
- 7.4. CCEE press releases and new items were published in *L'Europe au fil des jours* in accordance with established practice.

SECTION VIII

ECUMENICAL COLLABORATION

- 8.1. Cooperation with the secretariats of EECCS and EKD in a series of practical and quotidian work-related settings, eg. exchange of information, addresses given to groups, referral of enquiries etc. has been satisfying.
- 8.2. Specific initiatives in respect of such dossiers as, the teaching of religion in the European schools and the assize on Unemployment, exemplify close cooperation vis à vis the European institutions.
- 8.3. The ecumenical prayer services referred to in section VI were organised jointly by representatives of Catholic, Reformed and Orthodox Church-related offices in Brussels and Strasbourg.

- 8.4. Despite efforts made by the General Secretaries of COMECE and EECCS, it was not possible to find a date for an initial meeting of the Joint COMECE-EECCS committee.

SECTION IX

LOOKING FORWARD

- 9.1. As has been the case throughout the fourteen years of COMECE's existence, the agenda of the EU institutions in the course of 1995-96 will probably produce matters requiring reaction at short notice.
- 9.2. Already this report identifies issues in a range of areas which will remain priorities for COMECE reflection and work throughout the coming year(s). They may be categorised along the following lines:
- A. The Inter-Governmental Conference 1996
 - B. The Church-EU relationship
 - C. Social Policy issues
 - D. Media Policy issues
 - E. Issues regarding Information Technology and the Information Society.
 - F. Bioethical issues
 - G. Organisation of various types of visits and meetings between Church leaders and groups and the EU institutions.

SECTION X

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION BY COMECE MEMBERS

- 10.1. What are your reactions to this report?
- 10.2. How would you assess the activities and initiatives reported herein in terms of the *Reflection Document* drawn up for the 1994 Spring Plenary?
- 10.3. Does COMECE have specific interests to defend before the EU institutions? If so, please identify a small number in concrete terms.

Noel Treanor
Nov. 1994.



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INTRODUCTION

The rhythm of the COMECE secretariat was maintained and developed throughout the year in terms of its major lines of activity. The secretariat continued to act as a point of contact with the EU institutions on behalf of the Bishops' Conferences, to provide an encounter point for persons and groups from the local Churches with EU officials, to be an antenna of Church interest in the shaping of the EU and to provide an information service for the Bishops' Conferences throughout the Member States. This should be a source of some satisfaction, granted the major investment of staff time required to prepare the new premises and to arrange the transfer of the office from Avenue Père Damien.

Initiatives on the part of the President, the Executive Committee, the inauguration of the new premises, and three key conferences marked significant achievements in the course of the year. These are detailed in this report.

I. INTERNAL PLANNING

1.1. INTERNAL MEETINGS

To facilitate planning and continuous monitoring of the salient points of interest to COMECE on the agenda of the Europe Union, the regular meetings between the President, the Secretary General and P. H. Langendôrfer were continued. Held mainly in Hildesheim, and in Brussels on occasion, these meetings took place on the following dates:

30.01.95
27.02.95
20.03.95
06.06.95
30.06.95
18.09.95
09.10.95
14.12.95

The work of each meeting was conducted on the basis of an agenda established by the Secretary General.

These exchanges have assured an invigorating exchange of ideas, continuity and propulsion in the work of COMECE itself.

1.2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The meeting of the Executive Committee was held in the Villa Mater Dei in Rome, 27-28 June. Having reviewed the Reflection Document *'The European Union and the COMECE'* submitted to the COMECE plenary of March 1995, the meeting proceed to a critical appraisal of the projects proposed for the remainder of the year. Due consideration was given to issues concerning the staffing and financing of the secretariat.

Following upon the helpful exchange in December 1994 between the President, the

Secretary General, P. H. Langendörfer and the Apostolic Nuncio in Brussels, Mgr. Moretti, it was decided to invite Mgr. Tauron to meet with the Executive Committee during its June meeting. Being out of Rome at the time, his assistants Mgr. C. M. Celli and Mgr. A. Lebeaupin met with the members of the Executive Committee. This short exchange noted the importance of collaboration and complementarity between COMECE and the Secretariat of State in respect of European construction.

A meeting was also held with the Father General of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, in order to discuss a range of issues. Chief among these was the possibility of launching a European Catholic review. This matter was pursued in further meetings in the course of the year with Fr. P. Harnett, President of the Jesuit Provincials in Europe.

II. TRANSFER OF THE SECRETARIAT

By December 1994 the structural adaptations to the COMECE house had been completed. From January 1995 onwards the interior decoration, furnishing and equipping of the house was a major task. The aesthetic and personal contribution made by Madame Micheline Le Brun, interior decorator, to this project and by the Secretary Madame Agnès Paillard's dedication beyond the call of duty deserve recording.

The secretariat was transferred from Avenue Père Damien on July 11, 1995. The relative tranquillity of the July-August period was availed of to attend to the details of installing the office.

The official inauguration of the premises on the evening of October 5 1995, the eve of the autumn plenary meeting, was performed by the President of COMECE, Bishop Dr. Josef Homeyer. The official reception to mark the occasion was attended by most Bishop members of the COMECE, the Papal Nuncio, his Excellency Mgr. G. Moretti, and some one hundred and fifty persons, many of them officials of the EU institutions. The President's address to mark the official opening was replied to by Mr. Leo Tindemans, M.E.P. Six pupils from the European schools in Woluwe and Uccle expressed a prayer or a wish for the role of the Church and Christians in the construction of Europe.

During Vespers on October 6, attended by the COMECE members, the Papal Nuncio, the staff of the secretariat and a small company of guests, the premises were blessed by Bishop Homeyer. Afterwards a small reception was offered to the guests.

III. OUTREACH OF THE SECRETARIAT

- 3.1. Throughout the year the staff members pursued their task of developing contacts and relations with the EU institutions and their personnel.
- 3.2. EU officials were invited regularly to join the midday meal at the secretariat. Working lunches, these occasions strengthened helpful contact points, advanced dossiers being handled by the secretariat and provided opportunities to develop some of the projects accomplished in the course of the year and described below.

- 3.3. Equally officials of the EU were visited in their offices by staff members in the pursuit of their work.
- 3.4. Numerous requests for assistance from agencies, institutions and organisations of the Church in the Member States and beyond were received and processed. Thus the secretariat assisted a wide range of activities in the life of the local Churches, ranging across such spheres as, assistance in organising conferences, European youth initiatives, the development of programmes on European themes in institutes of education, etc.
- 3.5. Regular contact and cooperation was maintained with the Nunciature in Brussels as with other Church-linked offices, in particular with the Jesuit OCIPE team, with the Dominican ESPACES office, with Justice and Peace and the CARITAS offices.
- 3.6. Cordial working relations were maintained with the office of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople as with the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS) secretariat and the office of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD). Relations with the directors and staff of these offices were cordial, collaborative and mutually helpful.

IV. RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

- 4.1. Since the completion of the Annual Report for 1994, the President of COMECE visited the outgoing President of the European Commission, Mr. J. Delors, in December 1994. In the course of 1995 he met with President J. Santer and Mr. K. Hänsch, President of the European Parliament, Commissioner Frau M. Wulf-Mathies as well as other high-ranking civil servants of the EU institutions. Occasions for discussing particular questions, these meetings signalled the interest of the Bishops' Conferences in European issues as well as cementing helpful personal contacts for the secretariat.
- 4.2. With a view to gathering information on relevant areas of policy-making, discussing and launching projects, and to establishing contacts, numerous meetings took place between the secretariat staff and EU personnel.
- 4.3. Prior to June 1995 COMECE had been present at the Dialogue Meetings with the European Commission in an observer capacity. As of that date it became a partner in those meetings with EECCS and the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission. In providing input to that meeting, which was dedicated to the Intergovernmental Conference, the COMECE secretariat involved the expertise of both the Jesuit OCIPE and the Dominican ESPACES offices.
- 4.4. Members of the secretariat participated in the briefings for the Churches' offices organised by the Forward Studies Unit after the European Council meetings.
- 4.5. Speaking on behalf of COMECE the Secretary General addressed the first Public Hearing on the Intergovernmental Conference organised by the European Parliament, in Brussels, October 17 -18, 1995.

- 4.6. Preparing the colloquium on Church-State relations involved regular contact and meetings with EU officials. This work aimed at building awareness of in respect of the issue itself and at advertising the colloquium.
- 4.7. Noting the importance of the Euro-Mediterranean Conference in Barcelona, November 27-28, the Secretary General made every effort to underline of the significant role of religion in the Mediterranean societies and its importance for the same conference. The Toledo seminar was resulted from these representations.
- 4.8. Aware of the increasing attention being given to the Information Society by both the European Commission and the European Parliament, efforts were made over a significant period of time to persuade the Commission to co-organise and part-finance a study and reflection session for Bishops and persons working in the services of the Bishops' Conferences. This finally resulted in the conference held in the Commission's Borschette building in Brussels, 13-14 October.
- 4.9. COMECE's presence at the plenary sessions of the European Parliament in Strasbourg was assured by P. J. Haber who attended Press Conferences and produced articles for the SIPECA review. The Secretary General also attended the plenaries frequently, as did Dr. W. Offermanns.
- 4.10. Daily presence at the European Commission Press Conferences was assured by the COMECE journalist, Mr. H. Yegles.

V. FORMAL EVENTS WITH EU PARTICIPATION

- 5.1. After a long period of preparation the international colloquium *'La construction européenne et les institutions religieuses'* took place on October 6, 1995 in Brussels. Forming the programme of the first day of the autumn COMECE plenary meeting, it was also attended by EU officials, diplomats and academics.
 - 5.1.1. The preparation of this conference was made possible by the cooperation of numerous individuals and groups: the President, Pater Dr. H. Langendörfer, and Professor Dr. G. Hobbers; the COMECE lawyers group, Prof. S. Marcus-Helmons, Madame F. Gasztowtt (C.E.F., Paris), Mr. J. Backbier, (NL), Prof. Dr. F. Eckert, (Austria), Herr L. Turowski (Germany); and especially by a small advisory group, Prof. J-P. Durand op. (Paris), Prof. P. Hannon (Maynooth), Dr. R. Ilgner (Bonn), Prof. S. Marcus-Helmons, and Prof. G. Robbers.
 - 5.1.2. Having adopted the proposal presented at the conference, the COMECE plenary recommended that each Bishops' Conference of the fifteen Member States provide a translation, substantially harmonious with the original, and contact their respective governmental authorities in order to present the proposal for inclusion on the agenda of the Intergovernmental Conference 1996.
- 5.2. With the assistance of P. G. Nissim op.(ESPACES) and with the support of M. M. Carpentier, Directeur Général, D.G.XIII and M. A. Stekke, D.G. XIII, an important first step was taken in opening an exchange between the Commission and the Church on the ethical, legal and social issues arising from the new technologies and their applications.

- 5.2.1. Participants included Bishops, persons working in the services of Bishops' Conferences, academics and a large number of EU officials.
- 5.2.2. The proceedings of the seminar have been produced in French by DG. XIII. English and German versions are expected in April 1996. The present document is accessible on the internet: <http://www.ispo.cec.be/infosoc/promo/conf.html>
- 5.3. Recognising the importance of the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Conference scheduled for November 27-28, the COMECE secretariat sought to highlight the necessity for the political processes of taking the social significance of religion in these societies into account.
 - 5.3.1. At the request of the COMECE secretariat, a request supported by EECCS, the European Commission agreed after due consideration to co-organise and finance a seminar for academics and specialists from the three monotheistic religious traditions of the Mediterranean and from the humanist tradition.
 - 5.3.2. The city of Toledo agreed to host the seminar, November 4-7, 1995. A symbolic act in a symbolic city, the event aimed at investigating ways of building respect and understanding between these traditions.
 - 5.3.3. The seminar was chaired by officials of the Forward Studies Unit and by an official of President Santer's cabinet. Observers from a number of Foreign Ministries of EU Member States attended.
 - 5.3.4. Together with fellow participants and spokespersons for the Jewish and Muslim traditions Archbishop E. Yanes, Vice-President of COMECE, gave a Press Conference in the European Commission office in Madrid.
 - 5.3.5. The Barcelona Declaration itself states: "support will be given to periodic meetings of representatives of religions and religious institutions as well as theologians, academics, and others concerned, with the aim of breaking down prejudice, ignorance and fanaticism"
 - 5.3.6. COMECE played a tenacious role in promoting and organising this event. Its efforts were given invaluable support by Pater Hans Vöcking and CIBEDO, Frankfurt. The European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS) also assisted in organising the event.

VI. VISIT TO BISHOPS' CONFERENCES

- 6.1. On foot of the President's suggestion during the course of the 1994 plenary meetings, the Secretary General was invited to address three Bishops' Conferences. These visits provided an opportunity to present the EU institutions, the current priorities of COMECE's work and to hear the concerns of the members of the Bishops' conferences in respect of the European project.

- 6.2. During its September meeting the Scandinavian Bishops' conferences devoted a working-session to European questions. P. H. Langendörfer and the Secretary General addressed this session.
- 6.3. Likewise the Bishops' Conference of the Netherlands was addressed by the Secretary General on October 9, 1995.
- 6.4. On November 21 the Secretary General spoke to the Spanish Bishops' Conference during its meeting in Madrid.

VII. INFORMATION SERVICE

- 7.1. The plenary sessions of the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe were covered and reported in the SIPECA publications.
- 7.2. As in previous years the review was written, translated, processed for printing and prepared for posting by members of the secretariat staff. The coincidence of transferring the office and the organisation of three conferences in rapid succession has caused a unavoidable delay in meeting publication deadlines.
- 7.3. The monthly newsflash *Europe Infos*, conceptualised and produced by Mr. R. Yegles, was launched in March 1995.

VIII THE TEACHING OF RELIGION IN THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS

- 8.1. The teaching of religion in the nine European schools proceeded calmly in the course of 1995. This dossier was monitored regularly throughout the year.
- 8.2. Unlike the preceding year no major difficulties arose.

IX. ECUMENICAL ACTIVITIES AND CONTACTS

- 9.1. Throughout the year contacts were maintained at personal and work level with the offices of the Orthodox Church, with the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS) and the office of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD).
- 9.2. Together with the Secretary General and F. H. Langendörfer, the President visited the Patriarch of Constantinople, August 19-21 1995. An informative exchange on respective perceptions of the challenges posed by Europe to the Churches, this cordial encounter laid the basis for the preparation of a collaborative seminar.
- 9.3. Staff members took part in ecumenical prayer services in Brussels and Strasbourg. Assistance was given to European Parliament officials in the preparation of the Ecumenical Prayer Service for the Deceased of the EFF group in November. COMECE was represented at that service by Dr. W. Offemlanns and F. J. Raber.
- 9.4. The inaugural meeting of the COMECE-EECCS Joint Committee was held on September 22, 1995. It will meet twice a year, review the EU agenda, discuss common concerns and reflect on any issues of common interest.

X. LOOKING FORWARD

- 10.1. Regular staff meetings should ensure more efficient and cohesive team work at the secretariat level.
- 10.2. Planned utilisation of the COMECE premises will be a priority.
- 10.3. A further report provided for the March 1996 plenary on Social Policy will facilitate the orientation of COMECE's work in this important sphere.
- 10.4. The progress of the Intergovernmental Conference will be monitored.
- 10.5. Organising a programme of follow-up to the Toledo seminar will require ongoing attention.
- 10.6. An informal group of specialists will be established to work on bioethical issues arising on the EU agenda.
- 10.7. It is also planned to constitute a small group of specialists to work on Media policy issues.

Noël Treanor
March 1996



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

COMECE

ANNUAL REPORT

1996

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INTRODUCTION

The activities undertaken by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) in the form of its two annual plenary meetings and the numerous initiatives of its Brussels-based secretariat show 1996 to have been a year of intense and fruitful work. In the closing section of the 1995 Annual Report, entitled *Looking Forward*, seven points for further development throughout 1996 were identified:

- (i) staff meetings,
- (ii) use of the COMECE premises for meetings and foyer evenings,
- (iii) development of the secretariat's work in respect of EU Social Policy,
- (iv) monitoring of the IGC process,
- (iv) pursuit of the fruits of the Toledo seminar in respect of inter-religious dialogue in the Mediterranean in the context of the EU-Mediterranean policy,
- (v) the creation of a small group of specialists on bioethical issues, and
- (vi) the establishment of a working group on EU media policy.

Positive results have been achieved in all seven areas, although obstacles arising in the political arena were encountered in respect of the follow-up to Toledo. Among the main events of the year were: the two COMECE plenary meetings on Economic and Monetary Union in spring and on Enlargement of the EU in the autumn, the realisation of the initiative undertaken by the President with the support of Archbishop Defois in the form of the Reims seminar, the pursuit of the proposal of an article to the IGC on Church-State relations, the creation and preparation of a programme of work for the Social Affairs Group, the launching of the new monthly Europe Infos, participation in the ecumenically organised Consultation on Poverty and Social Exclusion, and the transfer of the archives from the secretariat's previous location at 13 Avenue Père Damien. The March plenary marked the end of the Secretary General's first mandate (1993-96) and the renewal thereof for a further three years. Likewise the November plenary marked the completion of the Executive Committee's mandate, the President and two Vice Presidents having been returned to office for a further mandate (1996-99).

I INTERNAL PLANNING

1.1. THE PRESIDENT

To facilitate planning and sustained monitoring of the chief points of interest to COMECE on the agenda of the European Union and its institutions, the regular meetings between the President and the General Secretary were maintained. For the first half of the year they were assisted by Pater H. Langendorfer, since appointed Secretary of the German Bishops' Conference, and by Dr. M. Meyer, Zentralstelle Weltkirche of the German Bishops' Conference. Held mainly in Bishop Homeyer's residence at Hildesheim, in Bonn and Brussels on occasion, these meetings took place on:

19.02.96
22.02.96
27.02.96
11.04.96
23.05.96

16.09.96
14.10.96
16.12.96

The work of each meeting was conducted on the basis of an agenda prepared by the Secretary General. Each of some six hours in duration, these exchanges have assured continuity, energy and directionality in the work of COMECE and its secretariat.

1.2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The meeting of the Executive Committee was held at the Villa Mater Dei in Rome, 10-11 June 1996. Given that this year marked the completion of the mandates of the Secretary General and also of the Executive Committee itself, a critical review and the initiation of forward planning for the period 1993-1996 were the central objectives of this meeting. Basing its work on a brief document prepared by the Secretary General, on the Annual Report for 1995, the Document de Réflexion and the document on Social Policy prepared for the March 1995 plenary meeting, the participants noted with satisfaction the significant achievements of the period 1993-1996. Whilst recognising the limits both in terms of staff and financial resources it was agreed that the established method of work should be maintained and developed and that every effort should be made to ensure that the COMECE Working Groups should seek further to concretise their work in respect of draft EU policy.

At the end of a long and enriching exchange of views between Mgr. Tauran and Mgr. A. Lebeaupin, Secretariat of State, on the challenges facing the Church in Europe and in the global society, Mgr. Tauran informed the members of the Executive Committee of the Holy See's decision to establish a Nunciature to the European Union and to separate this function from that of Nuncio to Belgium and Luxembourg.

Having duly completed the remaining business section of the meeting regarding forthcoming events, the autumn plenary and finances, the meeting ended with a meal hosted by the President to mark COMECE's gratitude to H. E. Mgr. G. Moretti, Apostolic Nuncio to Belgium and Luxembourg, for his support for the work of COMECE.

1.3. THE PLENARY MEETINGS

At their Spring Plenary, held in Brussels on 14-15 March 1996, the members of the COMECE dwelt on Economic and Monetary Union and socio-ethical issues arising there from with the assistance of eminent speakers from the European Commission, the Banque Nationale de Belgique, the Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, the world of journalism, and the President of the Institut Monétaire Européen. A statement to mark the inauguration of the Intergovernmental Conference was also approved and duly published. A developed version of the proposal to the IGC was debated and approved. The Secretary General was re-appointed for a second mandate of three years.

The autumn plenary took place in Brussels on 21-22 November 1996. Enlargement of the EU was chosen as the principal theme for this meeting. Assisted by officials from the European Commission, members of the European Parliament, the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the EU, and the assistant General Secretary of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg), the meeting proved to be a rich and informative experience for the members and their advisers. The secretariat was mandated to

develop a working document on enlargement which had been prepared. It will be presented to the spring plenary meeting, 17-18 April 1997.

1.4. THE SECRETARIAT: STAFF

- 1.4.1. The staff members were active in the numerous areas of work set out in this report.
- 1.4.2. Staff meetings took place to facilitate communication and planning.

1.5. THE SECRETARIAT: WORKING GROUPS

- 1.5.1. The Lawyers Working Group met on 22.02.1996 and on 22.10.1996. Its members monitored legal issues in draft policy of the EU institutions. Reports were sent to the General Secretaries of the Bishops' Conferences.
- 1.5.2. The small Reflection Group on Bioethical issues likewise pursued its work of monitoring EU policy in the sphere of biotechnology. Helpful contacts were established with EU civil servants. The Bioethics Convention of the Council of Europe was analysed. Reports of the meetings were sent to the services of the Bishops' Conferences.
- 1.5.3. Wide consultation was undertaken to establish the Working Group on Social Affairs. The secretariats of the Bishops' Conferences have been consulted on membership and support for its work. Its first meeting is scheduled for 21-22 March 1997.
- 1.5.4. Two reports on the current state of proposal in the sphere of EU social and economic policy were produced and sent to COMECE members and to the Bishops' Conferences. A response to a Communication of the European Commission in the realm of social policy on the Future of Pension Systems in the EU was also produced and distributed.
- 1.5.5. Initial steps were taken to create a small Working Group on Media policy. Its task will be to examine draft policy in this sphere. Its inaugural meeting is scheduled for 21 April 1997.

II. COMPLETION OF THE TRANSFER OF THE SECRETARIAT

- 2.1. At the request of Mgr. Moretti COMECE agreed to continue to rent from the Apostolic Nunciature the house at 13 Avenue Père Damien and to ensure that it was inhabited after the transfer of the COMECE secretariat to its present location. Upon the nomination of Mgr. Lebeauvin as chargé d'affaires a.i. at the new Apostolic Nunciature to the European Union, it was necessary to remove the COMECE archives and clear the premises. This was effected in the course of June and July. The final removal of archives and remaining material to Rue Stévin took place on July 13, 1996 and the keys of the house at 13 Avenue Père Damien were returned to the Nunciature on 26 July 1996.
- 2.2. The transfer of the office in 1995 was effected without any extra assistance. Work remained to be completed in furnishing the property at 42 Rue Stévin.
- 2.3. Likewise small alterations and improvements to the property were effected: a stairway installed in the rear cellar, a tile floor in the oratory.
- 2.4. The computer system was developed to facilitate the needs of staff and more efficient work. E-mail was installed.

III. THE SECRETARIAT'S OUTREACH

- 3.1. Throughout the year the staff members pursued their task of developing contacts and relations with the EU institutions and their personnel.
- 3.2. EU officials, Members of the European Parliament, persons working in the European milieu were invited to the midday meal at the secretariat. Working lunches, these occasions strengthened helpful contact points, helped to advance dossiers being handled by the secretariat and provided opportunities to develop some of the projects undertaken in the course of the year.
- 3.3. Officials of the EU institutions were visited in their offices by staff members in the pursuit of their work and also to assist the work of the COMECE Working Groups.
- 3.4. Small groups of interns from central and eastern European countries working with the EP Group at the European Parliament were received monthly for a briefing on COMECE and its work by the Secretary General or one of the staff members. Since most of these persons will enter politics or political administration in their native countries, these discussions mark a potentially helpful contact in respect of Church and society/politics.
- 3.5. Numerous requests for assistance from agencies, institutions (third level students and colleges) and from agencies of the Church in the Member States and beyond were received and processed by members of staff.
- 3.6. A small group of EU civil servants met frequently with a member of the COMECE staff in the evenings at the secretariat for theological reflection on Christian engagement in society and in Europe.
- 3.7. Regular contact and co-operation were maintained with the Nunciature in Brussels as with other Church-linked offices, in particular with the Jesuit OCIPE team, with the Dominican ESPACE office, with Justice and Peace and with the CARITAS EUROPE office, with CEEC (Comité Européen pour L'Enseignement Catholique), and with the European Laity Forum.
- 3.8. The Radio Catholique Francophone (RCF), still in its early stages, was given ideas and support for its programmes on European issues.
- 3.9. Cordial working relations and co-operation were maintained with the office and staff members of the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS), with the office of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD).
- 3.10. Likewise the long-standing good relations with the office of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople were maintained. As well as regular meetings between its director and the Secretary General, contact and co-operation has been developed.

IV. RELATIONS WITH THE EU INSTITUTIONS

- 4.1. Contacts between the President and high-ranking civil servants of the Union occurred in the context of the plenary meetings and during the preparation and realisation of the Reims seminar. The Secretary General and members of staff had contacts and meetings with chefs de cabinets, with officials at the Commission and with Members of the European Parliament as well as with officials of the European Parliament. Contacts were also developed with the Committee of the Regions as with some Regional Offices.
- 4.2. Regular contacts were maintained with the director and staff members of the Forward

Studies Unit (FSU) of the European Commission. These encounters proved particularly useful for COMECE's work and mission.

- 4.3. The Dialogue Meetings co-organised by the FSU and COMECE together with EECCS are another point of regular contact between Church and EU policy-shaping. Devoted to the interrelationship of Politics, Science and Ethics, and held on June 13, the participants from the EU institutions and those from the Churches explored the theme in respect of the BSE crisis and climate change. As on previous occasions the COMECE secretariat involved both the Jesuit OCIFE and the Dominican ESPACES offices in providing the necessary expertise for the meeting.
- 4.4. Members of the Secretariat participated in the briefings for the offices of the Churches after the European Council meetings of Florence and Dublin which concluded the Italian and Irish Presidencies of EU.
- 4.5. A series of meetings took place with European Commission officials and with Members of the European Parliament, particularly with members of the EP's Budget Committee concerning the budget line of the programme *Giving A Soul to Europe*. The Secretary General took part in these together with other members of the Screening Committee for this programme.
- 4.6. COMECE's presence at the plenary sessions of the European Parliament in Strasbourg was assured by P. Josef Raber. He follows the debates in plenary, attends the press conferences and provides articles for the secretariat's monthly publication. The Secretary General also attended the plenaries frequently.
- 4.7. The daily Press Conferences at the European Commission were attended by the COMECE journalist. The salient issues of interest and concern to the Church were reported in the monthly publication, *Europ Infos*.

V. PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS WITH THE PRESIDENCIES OF THE EU

- 5.1. COMECE and EECCS have been building up a tradition of meetings with the incoming Presidencies of the EU in order to underline the interest of the Churches in the project of European construction, to appraise the national authorities of current work in hand at their respective secretariats and to comment on the priorities of the incoming Presidency.
- 5.2. If possible COMECE and EECCS co-organise such meetings through and together with the appropriate persons and agencies of the local Churches
- 5.3. Because of the political situation in Italy during the Italian Presidency, it was not possible to obtain a meeting with the Italian authorities.
- 5.4. At very short notice a meeting was granted by Mr. John Bruton, the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) in Dublin on 14 June 1996. Bishop J. Duffy hosted the ecumenical group of participants. The Taoiseach and his assistants noted the documentation provided and points raised by the members of the delegation particularly regarding the Intergovernmental Conference, the issues of unemployment and the future of work. The meeting provided a necessary and useful opportunity to discuss the proposal to the IGC of an article on Church-State relations. Inclined to the opinion that such an article was unnecessary, the debate clearly resulted in the Taoiseach instructing his assistants

to re-examine the explanatory note submitted with the proposal. At this meeting the two General Secretaries requested a second and later meeting with the Irish Presidency to which the Taoiseach responded favourably, suggesting that contact be made in due course with Mr. Mitchell, the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs.

- 5.5. This second meeting was duly granted. It took place in the Justus Lipsius - the Council of Ministers - building Brussels on 25 November 1996. Mr. Mitchell met with staff members of COMECE and EECCS. The meeting dwelt on the progress of the IGC, the preparation of the Dublin document and on the proposal on Church State.
- 5.6. A request for a meeting with the incoming Dutch Presidency of the EU was made in conjunction with the Council of Churches in the Netherlands. Duly granted the meeting took place with the Minister of State, Mr. Patijn, in The Hague on 4 December 1996. The participants met beforehand to prepare their respective roles and input, the midday meal being hosted by the Council of the Churches in the Netherlands. Having presented the major priorities of the Dutch Presidency, the meeting dwelt particularly on the IGC, the reform of Lomé and development policy, the Information Society and again on the Church-State proposal to the IGC. Once again this proved a useful opportunity to present and explain the reason for the aforementioned proposal. As in Dublin a second meeting was requested for late April of May 1997; Mr. Patijn encouraged the participants to submit a formal request in late spring of 1997.

VI. COMECE-EU INTERFACES

- 6.1. In the course of the year a further series of events brought representatives of COMECE and of the EU institutions together in exchanges about the development of significant aspects of European society.
- 6.2. Chief among these was the *Autumn Academy* held in La Maison St. Sixte, Reims, (France). The result of a prolonged effort, this conference was organised by the COMECE secretariat in collaboration with P. M. Cloupet and Archbishop Defois, (Reims). The theme, *The Church in Europe and the Economic Policy of the European Union*, was discussed by some twenty five specialists from the Church, from a range of academic disciplines, from the world of banking and from the EU institutions. A series of rich inputs, including that of an Orthodox theologian, provided the basis for an enriching interdisciplinary debate between Church and high ranking political decision-makers. The papers of this conference have been produced in a limited edition by the COMECE secretariat.
- 6.3. The Churches' Consultation on *Poverty and Social Exclusion* co-organised by CARITAS, COMECE, EECCS and EURODIACONIA at the request of Directorate General V of the European Commission. Grant-aided by the European Commission, this process provided further exchange between Church and EU. Necessary for the management and administration of the process itself, in which the COMECE secretariat was closely involved, formal contact and exchange with EU officials was an integral part of the meetings for the national organisers on 25-26 March 1996 (Brussels) and 18-19 October 1996 (Leuven). The final report will be available in the spring of 1997.
- 6.4. Following upon the seminar co-organised with Directorate General XIII of the European Commission in October 1995, together with the secretariat of EECCS, the

COMECE secretariat produced a statement for the colloquium, *People First - Living and Working in the European Information Society*, held in Dublin, 30 September - 1 October, 1996. Based on the Green Paper on European policy on the Information Society and on the Report of the High Level Expert Group, *Building the Information Society for Us A"*, the statement was presented at the Dublin colloquium by Fr. G. Nissim o.p., who attended on behalf of COMECE and EECCS.

VII. PROPOSAL TO IGC OF AN ARTICLE ON CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS

- 7.1. The proposal for a Churches article adopted following upon the COMECE symposium on 5-6 October 1995 was further developed at the suggestion of the Secretariat of State between January and March 1996. A developed version, envisaging an insertion at Article F., par 3 TEU and at Article 236 TEC, was adopted by COMECE on 14.03.1996. The latter text was duly submitted to the governments and appropriate ministries of the Member States.
- 7.2. By late January 1997 four of the Member State governments had introduced three proposals for an article on the Churches to the IGC negotiations.
- 7.3. The COMECE Lawyers' Working Group monitored the progress of the article in the IGC negotiations.
- 7.4. The Secretary General and Mgr. Lebeaupin, Chargé d'Affaires at the Apostolic Nunciature to the EU collaborated closely in their efforts to promote this initiative.

VIII. FOLLOW-UP TO THE TOLEDO SEMINAR

- 8.1. In a series of small meetings plans were drafted to plan for a follow-up to the Toledo seminar and the paragraph in the Declaration of the Barcelona Ministerial Conference, November 1995, making provision for "support for periodic meetings of representatives of religions and religious institutions as well as theologians, academics, and others concerned...". Submissions containing suggestions were made to the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission.
- 8.2.1. Obstacles surfaced on the political side which put the process on hold. There is reason to believe that the dossier may be re-opened in the course of 1997.

IX. VISITS TO BISHOPS' CONFERENCES AND CONTACTS WITH THEIR SERVICES

- 9.1. Following upon the recommendations made by the COMECE plenary meetings in 1994, visits were made to two Bishops' Conferences in the course of 1996. These visits provided an opportunity to present the EU and its institutions, the significance of their work for the life and mission of the Church and the work and priorities of COMECE. Likewise they offer an occasion to hear the concerns of the Bishops' Conferences concerning the evolution of European construction.
- 9.2. The Secretary General addressed the Assembly of the French Bishops Conference on 7 November 1996.
- 9.3. The President addressed the Assembly of the Polish Bishops' Conference on 29 November 1996.

- 9.4. Regular contacts are maintained by the COMECE staff with the members of COMECE, as with the General Secretaries and the services of the Bishops' Conferences throughout the EU.

X. INFORMATION SERVICE

- 10.1. The final issue of the SIPECA (Service d'Information Pastorale Catholique) review, *L'Europe au fil des jours*, no. 115-116 was published in July 1996 in accordance with the decision taken at the spring plenary meeting of COMECE.
- 10.2. Having completed the translation of the final number of the aforementioned into its German version known as, *Europa Ereignisse Entwicklungen*, Dr. W. Offermanns completed his services at the COMECE secretariat. On behalf of the President and members of COMECE, the Secretary General made a presentation to mark the occasion.
- 10.3. *Europe-Infos* had been launched in March 1995 on a trial basis. In October 1996 it replaced the *L'Europe au fil des jours*. Written in French, it is translated into English and German. It is sent to all Bishops in the EU Member States, to the secretariats of the Bishops' Conferences and to subscribers.

X. THE TEACHING OF RELIGION IN THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS

- 11.1. In what pertains to the content of the teaching of the catholic faith (and other specific issues related thereto) in the nine European schools, COMECE is recognised by the Conseil Supérieur of the European Schools as the representative of the interests of the Bishops in whose dioceses a European School is located.
- 11.2. The teaching of religion in the nine European schools proceeded calmly in the course of 1996. This dossier was monitored throughout the year by the Secretary General in conjunction with Madame Roba.
- 11.3. By contrast with 1994, 1996 like the previous year did not give rise to any major difficulties in the administrative sphere.

XII. ECUMENIAL ACTIVITIES AND CONTACTS

- 12.1. Throughout the year contacts were maintained with the offices of the Orthodox Church, with the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS) and with the office of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD).
- 12.2. Staff members participated in a range of lunch time activities organised at the Lieu de Recueillement at the European Commission and at Ecumenical Prayer Services and breakfasts during the plenary sessions of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.
- 12.3. Assistance was given to European Parliament officials in preparing the Ecumenical Prayer Service for the deceased members of the EPP group. The Secretary General participated with priests and ministers of other Christian Churches in the celebration of this service in Strasbourg on 13 November 1996.
- 12.4. Meetings of the COMECE-EECCS Joint Committee were held on 15.02.1996 and on 18.10.1996. Providing an opportunity to review the work in hand in the respective

secretariats, the Joint Committee has an important symbolic value. Its existence and modus operandi are due for review at the meeting scheduled for 28 February 1997.

XIII. COLLABORATION WITH THE CCEE

- 13.1. The amicable and efficient contacts with the secretariat of CCEE in St. Galien were sustained.
- 13.2. The Secretary General of CCEE attended the COMECE plenaries.
- 13.3. The Secretary General of COMECE attended the CCEE plenary meeting at Mariazell, 30.05.1996-02.06.1996, the meeting of the General Secretaries of the European Bishops' Conferences at Maynooth, 23-25.06.1996 and the symposium, *Religion: A Private Fact and a Public Reality, The Church in Pluralistic Societies*, held in Rome 23-27 October 1996.

XIV. LOOKING FORWARD

- 14.1. It is to be hoped that the summer months will provide a relative respite for the organisation of documentation, a matter of necessity since the transfer of the secretariat occupied the summer months of 1995 and 1996.
- 14.2. The inauguration of the Social Affairs Group.
- 14.3. The inauguration of a series of thematic evening sessions bringing the worlds of Church and politics together for discussion and exchange.
- 14.4. The launching of the Special Number series of *Europe-Infos*.
- 14.5. The development of contacts with Orthodoxy in regard to its place and role vis à vis European construction.
- 14.6. Planning the follow-up to the Reims Académie.
- 14.7. The determination of orientations and priorities for 1997 -1999.

*Noel Treanor
Réunion Plénière
April 1997*



**COMMISSION OF THE
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COMECE

ANNUAL REPORT

1997

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout 1997 the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) pursued its mission of monitoring the evolution of the policy of the European Union on behalf of the fourteen Bishops' Conferences in the Member States of the EU with a view to making input to the EU project on their behalf. By means of the two COMECE annual Plenary meetings, the meeting of the Executive Committee, through its monthly publication and by means of a wide range of activities engaging the EU institutions on the one hand and encounters with groups and organisations in the life of the local Church in the Member States on the other, COMECE pursued its task of creating a meeting-point between the life of the Church and EU policy makers. By the various means briefly indicated in this report COMECE contributed to shaping the European project on behalf of its member Bishops' Conferences. It also kept the local Churches abreast of developments in European policy-making. In accomplishing its task the secretariat maintained contact with the Apostolic Nunciature to the European Union, with the Catholic organisations present to the EU and with the offices of the other Churches.

The concluding section of the Annual Report for 1996 delineated seven areas of activity deserving particular attention in the course of 1997: (i) organisation of archives following upon the transfer of the secretariat to its present address in the summer of 1995, (ii) the launching of the Social Affairs Working Group, (iii) the inauguration of thematic evenings, (iv) initiating the Special Number series of *Europe-Infos*, (v) development of contacts with Orthodoxy, (vi) planning the follow-up to the Reims Académie, and (vii) the determination of orientations for the period 1997-1999. Drawing on the main activities of the year, this report shows that in these and other areas significant progress has been made during the course of 1997.

In 1997 the Presidency of the EU was assumed by the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The Treaty of Amsterdam, still to be ratified by Member States, was negotiated and signed. The Agenda 2000 process was launched and candidate countries for adhesion to the EU in the next enlargement were identified. At both EU and Member State level intense efforts were made to advance preparations for the transition to stage three of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). COMECE and its secretariat monitored these core facets of the EU 1997 agenda: as indicated in this report, initiatives were realised or planned (for 1998) in respect of each area.

The Second European Ecumenical Assembly with its theme, *Reconciliation - Gift of God and Source of New Life*, held in Graz, 23-29 June 1997 was a significant event on the 1997 calendar of the Churches in Europe. COMECE assisted CCEE in the preparatory process and contributed to the Assembly.

Whilst this report sets out the main activities carried out by COMECE in the course of 1997. It does not attempt to provide an exhaustive listing of all the initiatives engaged in by the members of the secretariat.

1. COMECE FROM WITHIN

1.1. THE PRESIDENT

In accordance with an established tradition regular meetings between the President and the Secretary General took place (02 February, 24 March, 28 April, 25 June, 28 August) in order to monitor the progress of work, identify the chief points of interest for COMECE on the agenda of the EU and to consider issues requiring attention on the part of COMECE.

The work of each meeting was conducted on the basis of an agenda prepared by the Secretary General. These exchanges have helped to ensure continuity and coherence in the work of the secretariat.

1.2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The meeting of the Executive Committee was held at the Villa Mater Dei, Rome, on 29 August 1997. The meeting began with a review of the then current priorities of the EU agenda and a consideration of COMECE activities in respect of the former. A series of issues were examined - the Declaration on the Status of Churches and Non-Confessional Organisations, (the result of prolonged efforts in which the Secretariat was intensively involved), the Enlargement of the EU, the feasibility of an EU-wide Consultation on the socio-economic condition of society in the Member States, the creation of a Working Group on Islam in Europe. A series of decisions were made regarding the aforementioned for inclusion on the agenda of the autumn 1997 Plenary meeting. The work in hand at the secretariat was reviewed. The members of the Executive Committee met with Mgr. C. Migliore, Sotto-Segretario, per i Rapporti con gli Stati of the Secretariat of State for an exchange on matters of common interest in respect of the EU and with Mgr. J-C. Périsset, Segretario Aggiunto, Pontificio Consiglio per la Promozione dell'Unità dei Cristiani for an exchange on relations with Orthodoxy.

1.3. THE PLENARY MEETINGS

1.3.1. The Spring Plenary meeting, held in Brussels on 17-18 April, chose Europe and Youth as its main theme. Particular attention was given to the European Voluntary Youth Service with the assistance of speakers from the European Commission (D.G.XII), the European Parliament, the European Youth Forum and from a similar programme developed for catholic youth in Germany. Further to the discussions it was decided that the secretariat should organise a one day seminar for representatives of Catholic Youth Organisations in the Member States to determine how they might better avail of the Voluntary Service Programme, to enable them review their contact with the EU and to identify how their presence in EU institutions and programmes might be strengthened. A Framework Programme for 1996-1999 was adopted, a Working Document on Enlargement of the EU and a COMECE statement *Building Bridges between Peoples* (09 May) were also adopted. Reports were given from the COMECE Working Groups.

1.3.2. The Autumn Plenary, held in Brussels on 30-31 October, considered the political structures and organisations serving Peace in the post 1989 Europe. Several considerations led to the choice

of theme: the changes in provisions for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in the Treaty of Amsterdam, the fact that some Episcopal Conferences (Netherlands, Germany) were examining issues pertaining to peace and security, the EU's tragic weakness regarding the Balkans. Following discussion on the inputs made by officials from the European Commission DG.1A and the Ambassador of Austria to Belgium who is also the Austrian representative to NATO and the WEU, the Members of COMECE requested the preparation of a draft text on Peace and Security in Europe for consideration in the Spring 1998 Plenary meeting. Reports were supplied from the COMECE Working Groups.

1.4. THE SECRETARIAT: STAFF

- 1.4.1. The staff members of the secretariat were active in the numerous initiatives set out in this report.
- 1.4.2. Staff meetings were held to facilitate communication and planning.
- 1.4.3. Towards the end of the year a German trainee lawyer undertook a two month work experience (*stage*) during which time she assisted in the general work of the secretariat and assisted in researching questions of legal interest on the EU agenda and in the analysis of draft policy, such as, the draft report on sects, then under discussion in the European Parliament.

1.5. THE SECRETARIAT: WORKING GROUPS

- 1.5.1. The Lawyers' Working Group met on 25 February and on 04 November. The work carried out by its members concentrated on presenting a proposal of an article on Church-State relations to the Intergovernmental Conference (25 February) and the appraisal of the Amsterdam declaration (04 November), legal issues arising in EU policy, draft European Parliament reports such as that on sects (Berger). Exchange of information on matters of juridical concern to the Bishops' Conferences represented in the group featured on the agenda. Reports were sent to the General Secretaries of the Bishops' Conferences of the Member States of the European Union.
- 1.5.2. The Reflection Group on Bioethical issues met on 09 April and 29 September and worked out a proposal for a Directive from the European Parliament and the Council on in vitro diagnosis (09 April) and on the ethical issues arising from cloning (29 September). The Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights and Bio-medicine was analysed. A short commentary was also prepared on the proposal for a directive on bio-technological inventions. The results of the group's work were sent to the secretariat's of the Bishops' Conferences. The group also contributed to the Europe-Infos Special Number on Bio-Ethics.
- 1.5.3. The inaugural meeting of the Working Group on Social Affairs, chaired by its President Bishop A. van Luyn, took place on 21-22 March. The membership of the group and its working method had been established in the latter half of 1996. *Employment and Unemployment in the European Union* was taken as the theme of the first meeting. The second meeting of this Working Group was held on 10-11 October; its theme being *Solidarity and Social Cohesion in a Monetary Union*. The proceedings entailed contributions from specialists from the EU institutions and other sources as well as from the group members. Two seminal Reports resulted from the meetings. These reports have been widely disseminated and have been

requested by personnel of the EU institutions. The proposal for a social congress to consider the Political and Social Implications of EMU from the viewpoint of the Church's Social Teaching emerged from the Working Group's deliberations; it is scheduled for 20-21 February 1998.

- 1.5.4. The first meeting of the COMECE Working Group on Media Policy took place on 21 April. Having identified the services of the EU institutions with which it should liaise and having agreed on methods for regular contacts with these services as well as with other organisations such as, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and other Church organisations working in the field of media and audio-visual policy, the Working Group's first meeting produced a statement in defence of public broadcasting in Europe. This statement was sent with a cover letter signed by the President to the Mr. A. Nuis (NL) then chairman of Council responsible for media issues, to Commissioner Oreja and to members of the European Parliament's Committee on Culture, Youth, Education and the Media. The second meeting was held on 28 September 1998 and members of the Working Group were in regular contact with the relevant services of the EU institutions throughout the year.
- 1.5.5. An ad hoc Working Group was constituted by the Autumn 1996 Plenary Meeting to devise a key for the equitable and just distribution of the COMECE budget among its member Bishops' Conferences. The Group was made up of the financial advisers of a representative number of the Episcopal Conferences - Italy, Spain, England and Wales, the Netherlands, Germany and Austria. Three meetings were held on 03 February, 05 September and 01 December. Reports of progress were made to the two Plenary meetings during the course of the year. The work was completed at the third meeting. The final report and the key for regulating the contributions of the member Conferences will be presented to the Spring Plenary meeting in 1998.
- 1.5.6. In the course of the second half of the year steps were taken to constitute a Working Group on Islam in Europe and to establish its *modus operandi*. The inaugural meeting is scheduled for 27-28 January 1998.
- 1.5.7. Good working relations were maintained both through the Working Groups and through regular contacts with other Church-linked offices in Brussels, CARITAS, CIDSE, ESPACES, Justice and Peace, OCIPE.

2. COMECE: MONITORING THE EU AND ITS INSTITUTIONS

2.1. RELATIONS WITH THE EU INSTITUTIONS

- 2.1.1. Throughout the year contacts were maintained with officials of the EU institutions, with Members of the European Parliament by the President and by the staff of the secretariat.
- 2.1.2. On 07 May the President, Bishop Homeyer, met with Commissioner Franz Fischler to discuss a series of matters including EU agricultural and rural policy and particularly how exchanges between the COMECE and the European Commission might be intensified.
- 2.1.3. In line with established practice COMECE, together with the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS), requested a meeting with the EU Presidencies.

A meeting had already taken place on 04 December 1996 with the Dutch Presidency which took up office on 01 January (viz. Annual Report, 1996, p.10). Whilst it proved impossible for the Luxembourg Presidency (in office during the second half of 1997) to provide for such a meeting, the incoming British Presidency met with a Church delegation, including representatives of COMECE on 15 December at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Issues on the Presidency programme and particular concerns of the Churches were discussed at these meetings. The UK Foreign Secretary, Mr. R. Cook, suggested a review of the Presidency in summer 1998 with representatives of the Churches.

- 2.1.4. Regular contacts were kept with the European Commission, its cabinets and Directorates General, by staff members in the context of their work, and on behalf of the Working Groups. The daily press conferences at the Commission were attended by the COMECE journalist. The COMECE documents produced in the course of the year were submitted to the relevant services.
- 2.1.5. Between the COMECE secretariat and the Forward Studies Unit (FSU) of the European Commission there was extensive collaboration in respect of a range of initiatives encompassing information visits to the EU institutions on the part of Church-linked groups from the Member States, provision for input from the EU to the Second European Ecumenical Assembly at Graz and input on the part of the FSU to events organised by the COMECE secretariat.
- 2.1.6. Staff members and specialists invited by the secretariat took part in the seminar (28 April) co-organised by the FSU, COMECE and EECCS on the Inter-Religious Dialogue in the follow-up to the Inter-Ministerial Conference, Barcelona (November 95).
- 2.1.7. The monthly Plenary sessions of the European Parliament in Strasbourg were attended and reported on in the monthly publication. The proceedings of those EP committees pertinent to the work of the COMECE Working Groups were monitored. There were numerous exchanges, both at the COMECE secretariat and in the Parliament, with Members of the Parliament and with officials of the EP and political groups. Monthly visits were received from young politicians and persons involved in the Christian Democratic movements in the new democracies of central and eastern Europe during the course of their *internship* at the European Parliament.
- 2.1.8. Staff members had numerous exchanges and meetings with officials of the Permanent Representations of the Member States to the EU. The Dutch Permanent Representative was the guest of honour at the Spring Plenary. Officials from Representations attended some of the *soirées* organised by the secretariat.
- 2.1.9. Numerous contacts were had with offices representing the regions of Member States of the EU.

2.2. INITIATIVES TAKEN AND SUPPORTED BY COMECE VIS-A-VIS THE EU

- 2.2.1. From January to June of 1997 the secretariat followed the developments in negotiations regarding the proposal to the Intergovernmental Conference of an article on Church-State relations in the Member States. On numerous occasions in collaboration with the Apostolic Nunciature to the European Union, the secretariat facilitated the services of several Bishops' Conferences in the Member States in co-ordinating their representations to their respective

governments in this matter. At a delicate moment in the IGC negotiations towards the end of March 1997, upon receiving indications that a re-worked and ecumenically accepted version of the proposal would facilitate the IGC negotiators, the COMECE secretariat organised a meeting on 07 April attended by the Chargé d'Affaires of the Apostolic Nunciature to the European Union, the Director of the Orthodox Representation to the EU, a representative of the Kommissariat of the German Bishops (Bonn), a representative of the Austrian Bishops Conference, of the Italian Bishops' Conference, the General Secretary of the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS), the director of the EKD office in Brussels as the plenipotentiary representative of the EKD and Professor Robbers (Trier). The meeting resulted in an ecumenical version of the proposal which was submitted to the IGC negotiators. The final steps of the IGC were closely monitored in conjunction with the services of the Episcopal Conferences whose Member States had promoted the proposal in the IGC. The Amsterdam Declaration, resulting from the process launched by the COMECE colloquium in October 1995, received an initial assessment at the Autumn 1997 Plenary.

- 2.2.2. In January 1997 the final amendments were made to the Report on Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe. This emerged from a Consultation conducted in 1996 throughout the Member States with the financial support of D.G.V. of the European Commission. The process was directed by COMECE, CARITAS EUROPA, EECCS and EURO DIACONIA. The Report was presented on 27-28 January.
- 2.2.3. With a view to producing analysis and commentary on the European Commission's Green Paper on Relations between the European Union and the ACP Countries at the Eve of the Twenty-First Century, a Hearing was organised in the secretariat on 11 March. This and further consultations with EU officials led to the preparation of a secretariat paper, finalised for July, and duly submitted to the relevant services of the EU institutions.
- 2.2.4. On 12 March, at the invitation of a Member of the European Parliament, members of the secretariat participated in an exploratory discussion on the comparative approaches of the Catholic, Jewish and Muslim traditions to ethical issues arising in the field of biomedicine.
- 2.2.5. Represented on the Screening Committee for the programme, *A Soul for Europe: ethics and spirituality*, the COMECE secretariat took part in a series of meetings with civil servants of the European Commission (the Secretary General, the Assistant Chef de Cabinet of the President, members of the General Secretariat) and with Members of the European Parliament to defend and promote the programme.
- 2.2.6. Staff members organised and prepared seminar programmes, involving contributions from the EU and COMECE, for academic groups from various Member States. Chief among them were: a group of third level Religious Studies students from the University of Sunderland (10 March), a Euro-schola group from Ireland (11 November), an EU study day for a group of priests from Cologne (22 October), a group of Canon Law post-graduate students from the University of Münster, (11 December).
- 2.2.7. On the basis of decisions taken at the COMECE Plenary meetings seminars were organised for spokespersons of the Bishops' Conferences (11 September) and for representatives of Catholic Youth Organisations in the Member States (17 October). Both meetings led to further initiatives to be organised by staff members in the course of 1998.

- 2.2.8. On request visits to the EU institutions were organised for small groups and for individuals including, Fr. Sivatski, Algeria (29 May), a small delegation from Kolpingwerk, Münster (06 June), to the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission for an initiative stemming from the Leader programme (12 November).
- 2.2.9. In the Spring of 1997 the secretariat was actively involved in searching for speakers from the European institutions for the relevant sections of the Second European Ecumenical Assembly (Graz, 23-29 June) programme.
- 2.2.10. The visit of a delegation of the Polish Bishops' Conference, led by His Eminence Cardinal Glemp, to the EU institutions (04-06 November) was an event of major significance. COMECE had played a key role in initiating the visit and in its preparation. The visiting Bishops found the programme most informative. It evoked widespread interest in the media both in Poland and in some EU Member States. Provision was made for follow-up. A report has been presented to the COMECE Spring 1998 Plenary meeting.

3. THE COMECE SECRETARIAT AT THE SERVICE OF ENCOUNTER BETWEEN CHURCH, OFFICIALS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND SOCIETY

- 3.1. Throughout the year the secretariat continued its tradition of inviting officials of the EU institutions, Members of Parliament and persons involved with aspects of European construction relevant to its work to working breakfasts and midday lunches.
- 3.2. A group of young EU civil servants met at the secretariat for ten evening sessions during the course of the year. Each session was devoted to the exploration of a theme linking Church and faith with contemporary societal issues. This initiative aims at creating a network of young civil servants and others interested in European construction.
- 3.3. During their *internship* at the European Parliament members of political parties or movements associated with Christian Democracy in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe were received monthly for briefing and exchanges.
- 3.4. A series of thematic evenings presenting significant initiatives in the life of the Church in Member States likely to interest a Brussels-based audience were held in the course of the year. Six such events, consisting of a presentation on the chosen theme, discussion and a reception, were organised. Planned on a linguistic basis, each evening was presented by (a) speaker(s) from a different Member State. Some two hundred and fifty persons participated in these sessions.

4. INFORMATION SERVICE, PUBLICATIONS, LECTURES

- 4.1. The COMECE review *Europe-Infos*, published in French, German and English was produced monthly. Two Special Numbers, the one on Bioethics, the other on Development: Lomé a New Partnership were also published. The review was distributed to all Bishops in the Member

States of the European Union, to the services of the Bishops' Conferences and to subscribers. Circulation has already begun in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

- 4.2. As deemed necessary and useful by the secretariat, the analyses and reports of the COMECE Working Groups were sent to the appropriate services of the Bishops' Conferences in order to assist them in their work. A Circular Letter was sent to the COMECE members and to the services of the Bishops' Conferences on such issues as Agenda 2000.
- 4.3. The proceedings of the COMECE Conference on Church-State relations held in autumn 1995 were published: *La Construction Européenne et Les Institutions Religieuses*, Bruylant-Academia, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1997.
- 4.4.1. Articles were written by staff members for the monthly review. Lectures were given on the work of COMECE, on issues pertaining to EU policy by staff members at conferences organised by services of the Bishops' Conferences and by universities and academic institutes.

5. THE TEACHING OF RELIGION IN THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS

- 5.1. In what concerns the content of the teaching of the Catholic faith (and specific issues pertaining thereto) in the nine European schools, COMECE is recognised by the *Conseil Supérieur* of the European Schools as the representative of the interests of the Bishops in whose dioceses European schools are located.
- 5.2. As with the two preceding years, the teaching of religion in these schools proceeded calmly. No major administrative difficulties were encountered.
- 5.3. A meeting of the representatives of the Bishops who have a European school in their diocese was held in Brussels on 28-29 November. Matters dealt with included, review of the framework programme, criteria for choice of teachers, inspection. Plans were made for meetings in the course of 1998 with the teachers and with representatives of the Local Bishops.

6. ECUMENICAL CONTACTS AND COLLABORATION

- 6.1. Throughout the year contacts were maintained with the Brussels offices of the Orthodox Church, with the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS) and with the office of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD).
- 6.2. The President and Secretary General visited the Patriarch of Moscow (31 January-02 February) with a small delegation. Discussions with the Patriarch and with officials of the Patriarchate on the challenges facing the Churches in Europe and on the work of COMECE vis à vis the EU were mutually informative. An invitation was extended to the Vice-Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Patriarchate to visit the COMECE secretariat.
- 6.3. The Secretary General participated in the meeting of the Joint Committee CCEE-KEK (20-22 January).

- 6.4. On the occasion of the visit (23 January) of the Presidents of CCEE and KEK, Cardinal M. Vlk and Dean J. Arnold respectively, to the European Commission to appraise President Santer of the Second European Ecumenical Assembly, COMECE together with EECCS organised a reception to mark the visit.
- 6.5. Staff members took part in ecumenical prayer services in Brussels and Strasbourg. Assistance was given to European Parliament officials in the preparation of the Ecumenical Prayer Service for the deceased members of the EPP group during the November Plenary session (19 November) which was presided by the Secretary General.
- 6.6. The meeting of the COMECE-EECCS Joint Committee (28 February) permitted exchange of information on activities being pursued by both organisations, an appraisal of the ecumenical acceptance of the proposal to the IGC on Church-State relations and a perusal of the European Commission's Work Programme for 1997 with a view to identifying issues of interest to the Churches.
- 6.7. Together with the Canon Law Faculty at the Catholic University, Leuven, COMECE, EECCS with the support of the EKD, organised a seminar on Church-State relations in Leuven (07 August).

7. COLLABORATION WITH THE CCEE

- 7.1. Regular contacts and exchange of information were maintained between the two secretariats. The Secretary General of CCEE attended the COMECE Plenary meetings and reported on CCEE activities. Likewise the Secretary General of COMECE attended the Plenary meeting of CCEE (02-05 October) and the annual meeting of the General Secretaries (14-16 September) where reports were made on the work of COMECE.
- 7.2. COMECE assisted in finding speakers from European institutions for the Second European Ecumenical Assembly, in some of preparations and in the administration of the Assembly, Graz, 23-29 June.

8. LOOKING FORWARD

- 8.1. Development of relations with the Bishops' Conferences of the candidate countries for adhesion to the EU - by promoting information visits to the EU institutions, and by visits to these conferences.
- 8.2. Maintenance and development of contacts between COMECE and the Episcopal Conferences of the Member States.
- 8.3. Implementation of decisions of the Plenary meetings, the organisation of seminars including the second Autumn Academy, scheduled for November 1998.
- 8.4. Promotion of improved co-ordination of the Catholic organisations working with the EU institutions.

- 8.5. The organisation of a seminar with the Patriarchate of Constantinople
- 8.6. Analysis and comment on the *Lineamenta* for the Synod of Bishops on Europe, planned for autumn 1999.

N. Treanor
March 1998



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COMECE

ANNUAL REPORT

1998

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INTRODUCTION

The Commission of the Bishop's Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) is tasked with monitoring the evolution of European policy-making by the European Union institutions. It is also charged with making input to the European Union institutions in a range of policy areas. It fulfils this mission on behalf of the fourteen Bishop's Conferences in the Member States of the European Union. To this end throughout the year 1998 COMECE continued to provide meeting points with EU officials through a range of activities: the two annual Plenary meetings, the meeting of the Executive Committee, initiatives undertaken by its Bishop members in their respective countries, the monthly publication and through of a range of activities involving the EU institutions on the one hand and exchanges and encounters with groups and organisations from the local Churches in the Member States on the other. This report is therefore a record of the contribution made by COMECE to the European project on behalf of its member Bishop's Conferences and the local Church in the Member States. It indicates some of the initiatives undertaken to assist the local Churches and their episcopates in keeping abreast of developments in European policy-making. In carrying out its mission the COMECE secretariat maintained contact and collaborated with the Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union, with Catholic Organisations which liaise with the EU and with the offices of the other Churches in Brussels.

The concluding section of the Annual Report for 1997 listed areas in which work was to be continued in the course of 1998: (i) the development of relations with the Episcopal Conferences of the candidate countries for admission to the EU, (ii) the maintenance and development of contacts between COMECE and the Bishop's Conferences of the Member States, (iii) the implementation of the decisions of the Plenary meetings and the organisation of a second Autumn Academy in November 1998, (iv) the promotion of improved co-ordination between catholic organisations liaising with the EU institutions, (v) the preparation of a seminar with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, (vi) the preparation of a COMECE response to the *Lineamenta* for the Special Assembly on Europe of the Synod of Bishops. This report shows that in these and in many other areas significant initiatives were undertaken in the course of 1998.

In 1998 the Presidency of the European Union was held by the United Kingdom for the first half of the year and by Austria from July to December. The core of the EU agenda of the year was constituted by: the continued preparations for enlargement of the Union, immediate preparations for the third phase of Economic and Monetary Union on 1 January 1999, pursuit of the Stability Pact and efforts to co-ordinate national employment policies in the Member States, advancing the Agenda 2000 reforms and the ratification of the Treaty of Amsterdam by some Member States. COMECE and its secretariat monitored the work programme of the Presidencies and policy development in the aforementioned areas.

While this report sets out the main activities carried out by COMECE throughout 1998, it does not attempt to provide an exhaustive listing of all the initiatives undertaken by the staff of the secretariat.

1. COMECE FROM WITHIN

1.1. THE PRESIDENT

The President directed the two Plenary meetings, the meeting of the Executive Committee, participated in, addressed and formally concluded the COMECE Social Congress in February and the COMECE Autumn Academy in November. In June on the occasion of a visit to the EU institutions he visited the President of the European Commission.

Planning and review meetings took place in Hildesheim on 02 February and 06 April between the President and the Secretary General in order to assess the progress of work, identify the main points of interest for COMECE on the agenda of the EU and plan ongoing work. The work of each meeting was conducted on the basis of an agenda prepared by the Secretary General. Two further such meetings had to be cancelled because of other unavoidable work commitments.

1.2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The meeting of the Executive Committee was held at the Villa Mater Dei, Rome on 24 April. It was attended by the members of the Executive Committee - the President, the two Vice-Presidents and the General Secretary. The chargé d'affaires of the Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union, Mgr. A. Lebeaupin, also participated. The meeting opened with a review of the then current issues on the EU agenda and of the activities of the COMECE secretariat in hand at that time. On the basis the input provided, the members of the committee considered the importance of information visits on the part of Bishop's Conferences from the candidate countries to the EU institutions and made recommendations regarding the content, frequency and follow-up to such visits. Further thought was also devoted to relations with the Orthodox Churches and particularly to completing the programme for the visit of a representative of the Patriarchate of Moscow to the EU institutions in Brussels. Other issues dealt with in view of forthcoming work in the Plenary meetings were, the proposal to co-operate with the Catholic European Study and Information Centre (OCIPE) in a new and developed version of the publication *Europe Infos*, elements for a response to the Lineamenta for the Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Europe, and the preparation of a statement in respect of the June 1999 elections to the European Parliament. A meeting took place with Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace during which a series of questions of mutual concern were discussed, particularly in the social sphere and in regard to Human Rights. The committee also met with Mgr. Celestino Migliore, Sotto-Segretario for Relations with States of the Secretariat of State to provide an update on the work of COMECE and to exchange on issues of common interest.

1.3. THE PLENARY MEETINGS

- 1.3.1. By way of an attempt to address a fundamental issue arising in several commentaries on the newly signed and still to be ratified Treaty of Amsterdam, the Spring Plenary, held in Brussels on 12-13 March 1998, addressed the question of the concept and vision of society required to carry the EU project into the opening decades of the new millennium. *L'Union Européenne: à la recherche d'une vision - identification d'éléments clés*, was the title chosen for the proceedings. Input by M. F. Riccardi, Editor in chief of *Agence Europe*, by Dr. M. Kohnstamm, who had been Secretary General of the High Authority of the ECSC as well as a colleague of Jean Monnet, and by Mr. R. Freudenstein from the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, Warsaw, encouraged the Bishops to launch a process of reflection on the issue. Thus the secretariat was given the task of preparing a draft text on the subject "What Vision for Europe"; a first draft is to be presented for consideration to the Spring Plenary in 1999. After due consultation with Catholic organisations and perhaps with the ecumenical partner organisations a final version was scheduled for 2000. A draft of the statement on Peace to be launched in Spring 1998 was also considered. A breakfast meeting with Commissioner Fischler explored the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the state of Polish agriculture and particularly the provision of adequate structures to provide for relations between the Churches and the European Union. Reports were given by staff members on the meetings of the COMECE Working Groups.
- 1.3.2. The Autumn Plenary took place in Leuven on 19-20 November. The meeting focused on the final draft of the COMECE statement on Peace, entitled, *Truth, Memory and Solidarity: Keys to Peace and Reconciliation*. In the course of the meeting the text (presented in German, French and English) was discussed, amended and adopted. The secretariat was mandated to provide for translations into Dutch, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish and Russian and to organise its publication for a launch at the forthcoming Plenary in March 1999. Reports were made to the meeting on initiatives in hand and on the activities of the Working Groups.

This Plenary meeting was held in conjunction with the second COMECE Autumn Academy which had as its theme - *The Future of Democracy: a Challenge for Society and Church*. Organised in collaboration with the Centre of Christian Ethics of the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL), this event brought together with the Bishops of COMECE a group of persons working in the EU institutions and various agencies liaising with the EU as well as some staff members of the KUL. After an introduction to the subject by Mgr. Yanes outlining the experience of the Church in Spain in this century, the proceedings of the academy sought to explore the link between democracy, culture and religion through contributions from a journalist (Mrs. F. Lewis), an historian (Professor M. Michel Rouche) and from an Ambassador to the Council of Europe (Herr J. Dohmes). The programme then explored the Christian tradition as a source to enliven and strengthen democracy: two contributions, one from an economist (Professor S. Zamagni) and the other from Mgr. O. de Berranger (Bishop of St. Denis) formed the basis of the debate. The conclusions were drawn by the President of COMECE, Bishop Homeyer. In accordance with the decision of the Plenary meeting the proceedings will be published in early 1999.

1.4. THE SECRETARIAT: STAFF

- 1.4.1. All members of the small secretariat staff were involved in preparing and achieving the activities and events set out in this report.
- 1.4.2. Staff meetings were held in order to carry out the decisions of the Plenary meetings, to plan the ongoing work of the secretariat and to provide for internal communication.
- 1.4.3. Efforts were made to find another full-time member of staff, a lawyer. Candidates with suitable qualifications and linguistic capabilities were interviewed and an appointment was made.
- 1.4.4. Further discussions were held with two Bishop's Conferences with a view to their nominating suitable members for the staff of the COMECE secretariat.

1.5. THE SECRETARIAT: WORKING GROUPS

- 1.5.1. The **Legal Affairs Working Group** met on 19.02.1998 and on 07-08.10.1998. The meetings began with brief reports on juridical matters of current concern to the Church in the Member States represented. Professor Feliciani of the CESEN, Milan, presented a proposal to organise a seminar with COMECE on modes of financial assistance to the Church by the state throughout the EU to the February meeting. The February meeting considered a series of relevant initiatives of the EU institutions and of the Council of Europe. Whilst the February meeting initiated reflection on article 13 of the Amsterdam treaty (non-discrimination), the October meeting concentrated on various aspects of this article and its possible significance for the Church and Church institutions. The article was also the subject of a meeting between the COMECE Legal Affairs Working Group and the Legal Affairs Group of the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS). Reports of the proceedings of the two meetings and documentation on issues treated were sent to the General Secretaries of the Bishop's Conferences of the Member States of the EU.
- 1.5.2. The **Reflection Group on Bio-ethical issues** held its meetings on 19 March and on 22 September. Euthanasia was chosen as the subject for the first meeting, given that in some Member States draft legislation on the matter was under consideration. The autumn meeting focused on the ethical aspects of biomedical research on the human embryo, a subject with which the European Commission and the European Parliament were occupied at that time. The results of the group's work were sent to the secretariats of the Bishop's Conferences. The results of the deliberations of the second meeting were sent to Madame Lenoir, President of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies (an Advisory Group appointed by the President of the European Commission) which met for first time on 19 February. The contents of this COMECE secretariat document were discussed the members of that group who requested that they be kept abreast of the work of the COMECE group.
- 1.5.3. During its meeting on 20 March the **Working Group on Social Affairs**, presided by Bishop A. van Luyn, devoted its attention to the proposals for the reform of the European Union's Structural Policy where more than one third of the EU budget is

presently channelled. Assisted in their deliberations by contributions from the European Parliament (Mr. B. Pronk, PPE/NL) and from the European Commission (M. Daniel Mouque, and M. Pierre Shellekens, D.G.XVI) as well as from the Church perspective (Dr. M. Meyer), the members of the Working Group considered aspects of the reform of European structural policy from the viewpoint of social ethics. Taking account of the reforms proposed in Agenda 2000, which the Group supported in the main, and of the imminence of EMU, the Group made a number of recommendations including that of including a flexibility clause in the reform of European structural policy.

This meeting preceded the COMECE Social Congress, *The Euro and Europe: the Political and Social Implications of Economic and Monetary Union*, planned by the Working Group and held on 20-21 February. An account of this congress is provided below.

The fourth meeting of the Social Affairs Working Group took place on 30-31 October. The issue addressed was that of proposals for greater equality in taxation in the European Union after the introduction of the Euro. It is a subject of central societal and socio-ethical significance and hence of importance for the Church in the Member States. The contributions of a series of eminent speakers (M. J. Vignon, DATAR Paris, Mr. Ruud Lubbers, Sig. Angelo Cardani, member of Commissioner Monti's cabinet, Mr. C. Drew for Mr. P. Cox, M.E.P., President of the Group of the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party in the European Parliament) enabled the participants to consider a series of initiatives taken by the European Commission at the suggestion of the Council of Ministers - inter alia, a proposal for a directive for the taxation of interest gained by EU citizens on investments in other Member States, a code of conduct for business taxation and a proposal for a directive on the introduction of minimum rates for the taxation of energy products. The proceedings of the meeting will be published and distributed to Bishop's Conferences and to the relevant services of the EU institutions. In a letter addressed to Bishop van Luyn, Commissioner Monti commended the proceedings of this meeting for exploring the ethical dimension of taxation policy issues. The report of the proceedings was also referred to by some journalists in the written media.

- 1.5.4. The COMECE **Working Group on Media Policy** held its meetings on 05 March and on 26 October. Having considered the outline programme for the Birmingham conference on Media organised under the UK Presidency, a Report on the work of the Oreja High Level Expert Group, and a draft European Parliament Report (Mr. P. Pex) on information and communication policy in the European Union, the March meeting concentrated on finalising a COMECE secretariat commentary on the European Commission's Green Paper concerning Convergence of the Telecommunications, Media and Information Technology Sectors and their Effects on Regulatory Policy: A Step towards the Information Society. This COMECE commentary was sent to the European Commission which put it on the website of General Direction X. It was also sent to Commissioners Bangemann and Oreja, to officials of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers and to the President and members of the European Parliament Committee for Culture, Youth, Education and the Media. On 29 July the European Commission published a resumé of the reactions to the aforementioned Green Book and invited further comment. On behalf of the COMECE secretariat the Working Group prepared a statement re-emphasising the essential points of its original commentary. This was submitted to the Commission on 03 November.

Further to completing the latter statement in its autumn session of 26 October, the Working Group studied a first Report of the High Level Group of Experts on Audiovisual Policy produced by the European Commission, published on the same day. During this meeting the members of the Working Group had a long and fruitful exchange with Mr. P. Pex, Member of the European Parliament and President of its Committee on Culture, Youth, Education and the Media. A series of issues in the sphere of media policy were discussed. Provision was made for the participation of members of the COMECE Working Group in a conference on *Media and Values* being organised for January 1999 by Mr. Pex as well as for maintenance of contact between the Working Group and the work of this European Parliament Committee.

- 1.5.5. The inaugural meeting of the COMECE **Working Group on Islam in Europe** was held on 27-28 January. This Working Group is tasked with keeping the Bishop's Conferences abreast of developments in regard to the political and social integration of Muslims in the Member States, with monitoring initiatives of the EU institutions in respect of Islam and with promoting the inter-religious dialogue foreseen in the conclusions of the Barcelona Interministerial Conference, November 1995. Contributions to the January meeting were made by a representative of the *Conseil Islamique de Coopération en Europe*, by a member of the European Parliament (Mr. A. Mohamed Ali, M.E.P.) and by officials of the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission and of Directorate General 1B of the European Commission. A work programme was set out in terms of the Working Group's tasks. The autumn meeting held on 27-28 October was appraised of activities foreseen in the third *volet* of the Barcelona process to promote dialogue between cultures and civilisations. Mr. A. Oostlander, Member of the European Parliament, outlined the content of his Report on Fundamentalism (which had just been rejected by the European Parliament some three days beforehand). Mr. Yataganas, a member of the cabinet of President Santer, commended COMECE on the creation of the Working Group, pointed to the recent emergence of a certain European identity in Muslim communities and encouraged the Working Group to maintain a proactive link with Directorate General 1B in view of the Barcelona process. The Working Group will produce a document for the Bishop's Conferences on the juridical, political and social aspects of the integration of Islam in Europe: it is hoped to make this document available in the course of 1999. Projects for inter-religious dialogue were prepared: these will be the subject of further deliberation in the January 1999 meeting. The Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission sought an invitation for a representative to attend the second meeting of this Working Group. It has also invited the Group to send a representative to a seminar on Islam which it will organise in February 1999.
- 1.5.6. Whilst the mission entrusted to the **Ad hoc Working Group on Financial and Budgetary issues** was successfully concluded in its third meeting of 01 January 1997, in a series of regular and short working sessions the financial advisers assisted the secretariat in managing the annual budget. In the November Plenary meeting the proposal to establish a Financial Advisory Group to assist the Secretary General was approved.
- 1.5.7. Hearings on EU policy issues and a platform for Church organisations monitoring migration issues were also organised by the secretariat: details are given below.

1.5.8. The Working Groups maintained contact with Church-linked offices in Brussels, especially with CARITAS, CIDSE, ESPACES, OCIPE, Justice and Peace.

2. COMECE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

2.1. RELATIONS WITH THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

2.1.1. The Plenary meetings and the Autumn Academy were times of direct encounter between officials of the EU institutions and the Bishop members of COMECE. Further contacts were made by the President, by members of the secretariat and on occasion by members of the Working Groups.

2.1.2. During his visit to Brussels on 10 June the President, Bishop Homeyer, held a series of discussions. In particular he met with Mr. N. van der Pas at the European Commission to discuss the progress of the Enlargement negotiations and ascertain issues which might be of interest or concern to the Church in that context. He also met with representatives of regions. On the same occasion he met with Mr. J. Santer, President of the European Commission, and in accordance with deliberations of several Plenary meetings he presented a proposal to strengthen and systematise relations between the Churches and the European Union (for details viz no. 2.2.5.)

2.1.3. In accordance with established practice COMECE together with EECCS requested meetings with the incoming EU Presidencies. A meeting had taken place with the incoming United Kingdom Presidency on 15 December 1997: a delegation of Church representatives met with the Foreign Secretary, Mr. R. Cook, at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London. Having discussed a range of topics (Enlargement, Employment, Environment, Lomé) of concern to the Churches, he offered to meet the delegation at the end of the Presidency. At the Foreign Secretary's suggestion this return visit took place in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 23 July 1998. Mr. Cook gave a survey of the Presidency with particular reference to the issues discussed in December 1997. He gave particular attention to the EU Code of Conduct on arms exports; in this regard the delegation pressed Mr. Cook to work towards including accounts of arms contracts refused on ethical grounds in the Annual Report on arms sales so that companies which reject contracts on ethical grounds might act as monitors on less scrupulous companies.

On 09 June a meeting took place in Vienna with the incoming Austrian Presidency. The Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Wolfgang Schlüssel, met with a delegation of the local Churches and representatives of COMECE and EECCS. Dr. Schlüssel outlined the Presidency programme and discussed the issues raised by the delegation - employment, enlargement, asylum and migration issues and social policy issues. The need to develop more systematic relations between the Churches and the EU institutions was also raised with the Vice-Chancellor.

A request for a meeting with the German Presidency (the first half of 1999) was granted and took place on 21 December 1998. The State Secretary for European Affairs, Mr. G. Verheugen received a delegation made up of representatives of the local Churches and of COMECE and EECCS. Mr. Verheugen outlined the priorities of the Presidency programme. Among the issues raised by the representatives of the Churches were - social ethical importance of advancing on Agenda 2000, the need for

European policies on immigration and asylum, coherence in EU policies in relations with developing countries, Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, the interest of the Churches in contributing to developing an EU Charter on Fundamental Rights, the status of voluntary charitable organisations, the protection of Sunday and religious holidays.

- 2.1.4. Both in the context of their ongoing work and in preparation of the meetings of the Working Groups staff members were in regular contact with the European Commission, its cabinets and Directorates General. The daily Press Conferences at the Commission were attended by the COMECE journalist. COMECE documents were submitted to the relevant officials and services. Numerous officials of the European Commission addressed meetings of the Working Groups throughout the year.
- 2.1.5. Close working relations were maintained with the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission. Its staff members contributed to a range of COMECE activities - information visits to the EU on the part of Church-linked groups from the Member States, official visits by Bishops to the EU institutions from the Czech Republic and from Slovakia, a delegation of Church leaders from Northern Ireland, and a programme prepared by the COMECE secretariat for the Vice-Chairman of the Department for External Relations of the Patriarchate of Moscow.
- 2.1.6. Staff members and specialists invited by the secretariat took part in the Dialogue seminars co-organised by the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission, COMECE and EECCS. On 19-20 January the subject of discussion was - *The Future of the Economic and Social Order in Europe* and on 23-24. November - *Development Policy in the context of Globalisation*.
- 2.1.7. The Plenary sessions of the European Parliament in Strasbourg were covered and reported in the monthly publications, *Europe-Infos*. The proceedings of the EP committees pertinent to the COMECE Working Groups were monitored. There were numerous meetings both in the COMECE secretariat and in the European Parliament with Members of the Parliament and with other officials. There were also several contacts in the course of the year with the President of the Parliament and his cabinet.
- 2.1.8. Staff members of the secretariat liaised with officials of the Permanent Representations of Member States and the Missions of the candidate countries for admission to the EU. The Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the European Union was the guest of honour at the autumn Plenary meeting. Officials from Representations and on occasion some Ambassadors attended the *soirées* organised by the secretariat.
- 2.1.9. Numerous contacts were had with offices representing the regions of the Member States of the EU.

2. 2. INITIATIVES VIS-A-VIS THE EU

- 2.2.1. The Social Congress, *The Euro and Europe: the Political and Social Implications of Economic and Monetary Union*, took place in Brussels on 20-21 February 1998. Prepared by the secretariat during the latter months of 1997 and the opening first weeks of 1998, the programme included eminent speakers, opportunity for group work and discussion in Plenary. The Social Affairs Commissions of the Bishop's Conferences sent some 100 delegates as participants. They participated with an equal number of persons from a wide range of backgrounds - some officials of the European Union institutions, other economists, bankers, business representatives, academics, diplomats, officials of liaison offices with the EU etc. The supranational character of the event, rooted in the nature of EMU itself, was noteworthy. Participants and some journalists greatly appreciated this event as a Church initiative, because it provided an opportunity to reflect on EMU from the perspective of the Church's Social Teaching. The event received coverage in the media. A special number of *Europe-Infos* was dedicated to this congress in July 1998. The proceedings will be published in early 1999.
- 2.2.2. On 04 March the COMECE secretariat organised a Hearing for representatives of Catholic youth organisations with offices in Brussels to assist them in assessing their relations with the European Commission and the European Parliament, to consider ways in which they might streamline their activities and to ascertain ways in which COMECE might support these organisations.
- 2.2.3. On 03 April a further Hearing was organised by the secretariat on the subject of the European Commission Communication, *Towards a Europe of Knowledge*. Some twenty-five representatives of organisations exemplifying catholic universities, catholic education and training institutes and catholic youth movements (from the Member States, Poland and Lithuania) had the opportunity to exchange with a representative of the European Commission and with the President of the European Parliament Committee on Culture, Youth, Education and Media on the basis of four assessments of the experience of the existing EU programmes in the sphere of education and training. A paper outlining the Church interest and engagement in education and a commentary on the Commission's Communication with recommendations was produced as a result of this meeting and sent to the relevant services of the EU institutions as well as to the secretariats of the Bishop's Conferences.
- 2.2.4. The secretariat undertook to organise a platform on EU policy matters related to migration issues for representatives of the services of the Bishop's Conferences in the Member States and for other Church-linked offices (the Apostolic Nuncio to the EU, CARITAS, ICMC, Justice and Peace, OCIPE, ESPACES) which monitor migration related policy in Brussels. The meeting took place on 28 May and focused on two proposals of the European Commission to the Council, one concerning the admission of third country nationals to the Member States (COM (97)387 final), the other regarding contemporary protection for displaced persons (COM (97) 93 final). Input on the political side was provided by an official of the General Secretariat of the European Commission, by a ministerial adviser at the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior and by an official of the European Parliament. This initiative, which also enabled the participants to exchange information on their respective activities, was welcomed by all involved. A short commentary on the documents was produced and sent to the

President of the European Commission, to the relevant EU institutions as well as to the services of the Bishop's Conferences. A further meeting of the Brussels based Church-linked organisations which took part in this initiative was held on 11 September to assess the possibilities for further follow-up and to discuss a strategy paper on immigration and asylum policy presented by the Austrian Presidency to the K4 Committee, 01 July. Further initiatives in this sphere will be taken in the course of 1999 and particularly with regard to the Tampere conference (October 1999) during the Finnish Presidency.

2.2.5 With a view to the United Nations designation of 1999 as the Year of the Elderly a colloquium was co-organised at the COMECE secretariat together with the AKSB and the contact office of the Austrian Bishop's Conference in Brussels. The programme enabled some thirty persons involved in educational programmes for the elderly to receive an update from EU officials on programmes of interest. This initiative also led to the creation of a network and Working Group from among the participants which will provide for contact across the Member States and liaison with the EU.

2.2.6 In his meeting with President Santer on 10 June Bishop Homeyer, President of COMECE, raised the subject of relations between the Churches and the EU and made a concrete proposal to develop a more systematic modus and adequate institutional provisions for input from the Churches. The chief elements of the proposal were (i) an annual summit meeting between the President of the European Commission and the President of COMECE, those designated by the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches and by the Orthodox Churches for the purpose of the meeting, (ii) an annual dialogue meeting between the Churches and representatives of the EU institutions, (iii) three working meetings designed to make input on particular policy issues currently on the EU agenda, (iv) these three events to be prepared by a Joint Committee of members of the COMECE and Commission for Church and Society offices (CSC) and civil servants of the EU which will also provide reports on the results of the meetings for both Church and EU. President Santer reacted positively to the proposal and requested that his assistants prepare a response. Reservations to aspects of this proposal were signalled by the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (became CSC as of 01 January 1999) and by its Executive Committee. Addressing the General Assembly of EECCS on 14 September. President Santer made a direct, if implicit, reference to this proposal in the penultimate paragraph of his address. The matter will be discussed at the COMECE-CSC Joint Committee meeting in early 1999 and the conclusions will be communicated to the European Commission; soon thereafter the European Commission should outline its proposal in this regard.

2.2.7 Staff members liaised with the relevant services of the European Commission and of the European Parliament to prepare programmes for visits to the EU institutions by various Church-linked groups and individuals from the Member States and beyond. Foremost among these was the information visit of the Bishop's Conference of the Czech Republic on 26-28 May, led by His Eminence Cardinal M. Vlk. In collaboration with the Delegation of the European Commission in Bratislava the COMECE secretariat organised a programme for the visit of the President and Secretary General of the Bishop's Conference of Slovakia which took place on 07-08 July. The secretariat was also associated with the visit of the Assistant Secretary General and advisers of the Polish Bishop's Conference to the European Parliament on 20-21 April. Having informed its ecumenical partners EECCS and the Orthodox

office, it prepared a visit programme for the Vice-Chairman of the Department for External Relations of the Patriarchate of Moscow which took place on 27-30 May, immediately after a visit to the President of COMECE. The secretariat also contributed to the preparation of an ecumenical visit to the EU institutions by a delegation of Church leaders from Scotland which occurred on 16-17 March in which Cardinal T. Winning participated. At the request of the President of the European Parliament and his cabinet the COMECE secretariat co-operated in preparing the programme for an information visit of the Church leaders in Northern Ireland to the European Parliament and to the European Commission, 26-28 October. Each delegation was accompanied throughout its visit by at least one member of the staff.

- 2.2.8 Following upon an exploratory meeting with the spokespersons of the Bishop's Conferences (11 September 1997), a visit was planned for the latter to the COMECE secretariat and to the EU institutions. The participants in this programme on 30 November 1998 found it informative and expressed the wish to attend a COMECE Plenary meeting on an appropriate occasion.
- 2.2.9 The secretariat suggested and co-organised a seminar with the Pontifical Faculty of Theology, Maynooth, Ireland and with the office of the European Parliament in Dublin. Entitled *Ireland and Europe: Re-discovering the Hidden Vision*, it took place on 27 November. A successful effort to launch an ethical and Christian discourse about Ireland's changing place in the EU, some one hundred participants came from various spheres of life: Church, politics, local government, universities and the media. The proceedings will be published in the course of 1999 with a particular view for use in second levels schools.
- 2.2.10 Represented on the Screening Committee for the EU programme, *A Soul for Europe: Ethics and Spirituality*, the COMECE secretariat took part in numerous meetings throughout the year to assist in administering the programme. It was also represented on a sub-committee tasked with preparing an inaugural seminar, *Nations, Regions, Union: in search of European Identity*, to take place under the aegis of the programme in January 1999.
- 2.2.11 A member of the staff represented COMECE at the conference, Anti-Discrimination: the Way Forward (i.e. Article 13 Amsterdam) organised by Directorate General V of the European Commission and the Austrian Presidency. A report was sent to the General Secretaries and legal services of the Bishop's Conferences.
- 2.2.12 Staff members organised and prepared programmes, involving contributions from both COMECE and EU officials, for numerous groups from the Member States which visited the secretariat in the course of the year. They also facilitated visits to the EU institutions for some among these groups.

3. AT THE SERVICE OF ENCOUNTER BETWEEN CHURCH, OFFICIALS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND SOCIETY

- 3.1. The secretariat continued its tradition of inviting officials of the EU institutions, Members of the Parliament and persons engaged with the process of European construction to breakfasts and midday lunches.

- 3.2. A group of young EU civil servants continued to meet at the secretariat for evening sessions. This initiative aims at creating a network of young civil servants and others interested in European construction.
- 3.3. At the request the group of the European Peoples Party in the European Parliament the COMECE secretariat received a group of *stagiaires* once a month from the Christian Democratic movements in central and eastern European countries. During these briefings these future civil servants and politicians are briefed on the work of COMECE and on the Church's engagement with the process of European construction.
- 3.4. The series of evening lectures and discussions was continued. Subjects treated in the course of 1998 were, *The Church and the Greens* (P. Dr. Hans Langendörfer), *The Northern Ireland Agreement* (Prof. M. McWilliams), *Devolution in Scotland* (Cardinal T. Winning). Some one hundred and sixty persons participated in these sessions.

4. INFORMATION SERVICE, PUBLICATIONS, LECTURES

- 4.1. The COMECE review *Europe-Infos* published in French, German and English was produced monthly. Two special editions were prepared and published. The review was distributed to all Bishops in the Member States of the European Union, in the candidate countries of central and eastern Europe, to the services of the Bishop's Conferences and to subscribers.
- 4.2. In the second half of the year discussions were initiated with the Jesuit Office, OCIPE, with a view to co-producing the review *Europe-Infos* as a COMECE-OCIPE monthly. An editorial board consisting of COMECE and OCIPE staff members as well as officials of EU institutions is foreseen. The first issue of the new series is scheduled for January 1999. Initiatives will be taken to launch the review in the Member States.
- 4.3. As deemed necessary and useful by the secretariat, the analyses and reports of the COMECE Working Groups were sent to the appropriate services of the Bishop's Conferences to assist them in their work.
- 4.4. Articles were written by staff members for the monthly review. Staff members also published articles in academic reviews, lectures were given on the work of COMECE and on issues of EU policy by staff at conferences organised by services of the Bishop's Conferences and by universities and academic institutes.
- 4.5. Staff members took part in and addressed various congresses throughout Europe – for example, in the seminar co-organised by the Delegation of the European Commission in Warsaw and the Catholic Information Service (KAI) on Polish entry into the European Union. Aimed at catholic journalists, academics, clergy and politicians, this seminar was a direct result of the visit of the Polish hierarchy to Brussels in November 1997 (c.f. COMECE Annual Report 1997, no.2.2.10). Likewise lectures were delivered by staff members to academic and other interest groups: Charleroi (B) on 17 March, Oldenburg (D) on 09 October, Paris (F) on 15 October, Dijon (F) on 16 October and to numerous groups from the Member States which visited the COMECE secretariat.

5. THE TEACHING OF RELIGION IN THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS

- 5.1. In matters pertaining to the content of the teaching of the catholic faith in the nine European schools located in various Member States, COMECE is recognised by the *Conseil Supérieur* of European schools as the representative of the interests of the local Bishops.
- 5.2. Apart from the abiding challenge to find suitable teachers for the various linguistic sections in these schools, the teaching of religion in the nine schools proceeded calmly and efficiently. Serious administrative difficulties were not encountered in the course of the year.
- 5.3. A meeting of the representatives of the Bishops, in whose diocese a European school is located, was held in Brussels on 04-05 December. Matters dealt with included, the future of the European schools and the place of religion on their curriculum, updating the framework programme, inspection and the choice and training of teachers.

6. ECUMENICAL CONTACTS AND COLLABORATION

- 6.1. Throughout the year contacts were maintained with the secretariat of the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS), with the Brussels office of the Orthodox Churches and with the office of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD).
- 6.2. In co-operation with EECCS the secretariat assisted the relevant services of the EU institutions in preparing information visits for ecumenical groups of Church leaders to Brussels. These groups were accompanied by a staff member for the duration of the programme.
- 6.3. As a direct result of the visit of the President to the Patriarch of Moscow in January 1997, the secretariat hosted the Vice-Chairman of its Department for External Affairs, established a programme and accompanied him on his visits to the EU institutions.
- 6.4. Ecumenical groups from the Member States, representatives of the Anglican and Reformed Churches were received at the secretariat and briefed on the work of COMECE.
- 6.5. The meeting of the COMECE-EECCS Joint Committee (16 January) provided for an exchange of information on activities being pursued by both organisations and facilitated an examination of the European Commission's Work Programme for 1998 with a view to identifying issues of common interest. Among other items on the agenda were, EU Mediterranean policy, Enlargement of the EU and an evaluation of meetings with the EU Presidencies. Certain joint activities in the course of 1998, especially in regard to the Second European Ecumenical Assembly, Graz, June 1997, were reviewed.
- 6.6. Staff members took part in ecumenical prayer services in Brussels and Strasbourg. Assistance was given to European Parliament officials to prepare the Ecumenical Prayer Service for the deceased members of the EPP group during the November

Plenary (18 November). A member of the COMECE staff officiated with clergy of other Christian denominations at the service.

- 6.7. COMECE participated as an observer at the third dialogue between the EPP Group in the European Parliament, the European Union of Christian Democrats (EUCD) and the Ecumenical Patriarchate which took place in the European Parliament, 07-08 December 1998. In 1997 the second dialogue, held in Thessaloniki at which COMECE was also represented, the relationship of Church and State in the orthodox world was examined. The 1998 dialogue attempted to identify the role of the Church in advocating Christian values vis-à-vis political institutions and the political process of shaping the European project in particular.

7. COLLABORATION WITH THE CCEE AND WITH BISHOP'S CONFERENCES

- 7.1. Regular contacts and exchanges of information were maintained between the secretariats of COMECE and of CCEE. The Secretary General attended the Plenary meeting of CCEE in Valamo on 01-04 October and the meeting of the General Secretaries of the Bishop's Conferences in Moscow, 06-09 September.
- 7.2. The General Secretary of CCEE attended the Plenary meetings of COMECE and reported on the activities of CCEE.
- 7.3. Several enquiries from the Bishop's Conferences regarding EU policy issues were dealt with. A member of the secretariat addressed the Catholic Bishops' Joint Bio-Ethics Committee of the Bishop's Conferences of England and Wales, Ireland and Scotland. Addresses were also given to the Committee for European Affairs of the Bishops Conference of England and Wales (26 March) and to the Irish Bishop's Conference (09 November).
- 7.4. In the framework of a request by the Secretariat of State to some Bishop's Conferences to co-ordinate efforts to support the Church in the Holy Land (with particular reference to the status of Jerusalem), the COMECE secretariat organised a consultation for representatives of the Bishop's Conferences of some of the Member States and a representative of the Bishop's Conference of the United States on 16 October. The General Secretary of CCEE also took part in this consultation. Subsequently COMECE was represented by Archbishop L. Daloz at the symposium of Presidents and Delegates of Catholic Bishop's Conferences organised by the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Michel Sabbah, with the support of the Holy See, held in Jerusalem 26-27 October.

8. LOOKING TOWARDS 1999

- 8.1. Continued monitoring of European Union policy-making.
- 8.2. Launching and disseminating of the COMECE statement, *Truth, Memory and Solidarity - Keys to Peace and Reconciliation*.

- 8.3. The secretariat will attend to advancing the preparation of the draft of a "Vision Statement" for European construction to be produced in the year 2000. The secretariats of the Bishop's Conferences and competent persons will be consulted. The possibility of associating ecumenical partners will be investigated further.
- 8.4. A statement will be prepared in view of the elections to the European Parliament.
- 8.5. Efforts to maintain and develop relations with the Member Bishop's Conferences and planning information visits to the EU institutions in consultation with Episcopal Conferences requesting such visits will be sustained.
- 8.6. Further initiatives to assist the Bishop's Conferences in the candidate countries to prepare for the adhesion of their countries to the EU will be undertaken.
- 8.7. Together with the Director and members of the OCIPE team suitable initiatives will be taken to launch and promote the COMECE-OCIPE monthly publication, *Europe-Infos*.
- 8.8. A second Social Congress in March 2000 will be prepared; a seminar for EU officials on the ethical aspects of public policy making in the sphere of the bio-sciences will be planned; further efforts will be made to organise a seminar with the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
- 8.9. The series of thematic evening events will be continued.
- 8.10. Members of COMECE will attend the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Europe in the autumn 1999.

*N. Treanor
March 1999*