



**COMMISSION OF THE
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EUROPEAN COMMUNITY**

COMECE

ANNUAL REPORT

1999

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INTRODUCTION

The Commission of the Bishops' 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 Bishops' Conferences in the Member States of the European Union. To this end throughout 1999 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 Bishops' 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 1998 listed areas in which work was to be continued in the course of 1999: (i) monitoring of EU policy-making, (ii) launching the COMECE statement *Truth, Memory and Solidarity: Keys to Peace and Reconciliation*, (iii) the preparation of a "Vision Statement" on the European project to be published in 2000, (iv) a statement in view of the elections to the European Parliament, (v) furthering contacts with the Bishops' Conferences and information visits to the EU institutions, (vi) assisting the Bishops' Conferences in the candidate countries to prepare for the admission of their countries to the EU, (vii) promoting the monthly review *Europe-Infos*, (viii) preparing a Second Social Congress for March 2000 and a seminar on ethical issues in the bio-sciences for autumn 2000, (ix) continuing the thematic evenings and (x) participation by several members of COMECE in the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops held in October 1999. This report shows that the objectives set out in the aforementioned areas were achieved and that other significant initiatives were undertaken in the course of 1999.

During this eventful year the Presidency of the European Union was held by Germany for the first six months and by Finland from July to December. Days after the launch of the COMECE statement, *Truth, Memory and Solidarity – Keys to peace and Reconciliation* war broke out again in the Balkans. March 1999 also witnessed the beginning of the crisis of the European Commission; a new Commission was installed in September under Professor Romano Prodi. Elections to the European Parliament were held in June. The massive earthquakes in Turkey contributed to the evolution of a new relationship between Greece and Turkey.

Whilst 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. It seeks simply to give an overview of the main activities undertaken in the service of the Bishops' Conferences and of the European project.

1. COMECE FROM WITHIN

1.1. THE PRESIDENT

The President directed the two Plenary meetings, visited the EU institutions in September, was a member *ex officio* of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Europe, met with the Executive Committee members in the course of the Synod in October, took part in the meeting between the Executive Committees of COMECE and CCEE (04 October), and participated in and addressed the conference *Europe after the Kosovo Crisis*, held in Oslo 15-16 November.

Meetings took place in Hildesheim on 04 May, 23-24 July and 05-06 September. The latter two meetings were devoted to further study of the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod on Europe.

1.2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- 1.2.1. Since it was impossible to find a date suitable to all members of the Committee, it was decided to defer the annual meeting to exchanges during the course of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. The Committee members were in close contact throughout the Synod.
- 1.2.2. In the opening week of the Synod a meeting was held between the Executive Committee of COMECE (the President Bishop J. Homeyer, the Vice-Presidents Archbishop F. Franck and Archbishop E. Yanes Alvarez, Mgr. N. Treanor, Secretary General) and the Executive Committee of CCEE (the President Cardinal M. Vlk, the Vice-Presidents Bishop K. Lehmann, Bishop I. Seregély and Don Aldo Giordano, Secretary General). A series of issues were discussed: the work of the Synod of Bishops on Europe, co-operation between COMECE and CCEE, relations with the Conference of European Churches. It was decided that the Secretary General of COMECE should be a member of the CCEE-CEC Joint Committee.
- 1.2.3. The Executive Committee met with Archbishop J-L. Tauran, Secretary for Relations with States at the Secretariat of State, on 12 October, over lunch at his invitation. Among the issues discussed were: the new European Commission, Bishop Homeyer's meeting with President Prodi at the end of September, the Church presence to the EU, the Stability Pact for the Balkans.

1.3. THE PLENARY MEETINGS

- 1.3.1. Taking place some months before the elections to the European Parliament, *The European Union and its Parliament (L'Union Européenne et son Parlement)* was the

principal theme chosen for the Spring Plenary, held in Brussels on 11-12 March. Input by M. F. Morillo Fonseca, tasked with co-ordinating the follow-up to the Treaty of Amsterdam on behalf of the European Commission, Mr. N. Dorr, former Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and personal representative of Irish Government to the IGC which negotiated the Amsterdam Treaty, and Dr. M. Shackleton, Head of the Conciliation Secretariat of the European Parliament enabled the Bishops to consider the context of the elections, to have an update on the new powers of the European Parliament and to explore the role of the European Parliament in the conciliation process. The Plenary discussed, amended and adopted a statement to mark the European elections. During the course of a reception the COMECE statement *Truth, Memory and Solidarity – Keys to Peace and Reconciliation* was officially presented by the President to the Secretary General of the Council of Ministers, Dr. J. Trumpf. Mgr. F. Frezza, assistant secretary at the Synod of Bishops addressed the meeting on the preparations for the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. To further strengthen the link between COMECE and the national Bishops' Conferences the spokespersons of the member Episcopal Conferences were invited to attend. Those who were able to come indicated their satisfaction and the utility of the experience for their work.

- 1.3.2.1. Events in Europe in the months following upon the March meeting suggested the central theme for the Autumn Plenary – *Europe: from rupture to new beginning (L'Europe: ruptures et nouveau départ)*. The meeting took place in Brussels on 18-19 November and explored the implications of the crisis of the European Commission, the institutional implications of enlargement, the challenges of the forthcoming IGC and the efforts to give the EU a profile in the field of foreign policy. Contributions were made by the former Belgian Prime Minister Mr. J-L. Dehaene who presented the essentials of the report (18 October) produced by a *Groupe des Sages* which he presided. Dr. T. Jansen, a member of the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission, presented an analysis of the institutional crisis in the EU. Commissioner M. Barnier outlined the priorities of the new European Commission, concentrating on the challenge of enlargement and on the IGC. Dr. G. Burghardt, Director General of the External Relations DG at the European Commission provided the meeting with an overview of developments in the evolution of a European defence and security policy. In the course of a reception held at the COMECE secretariat experiences of the Synod of Bishops for Europe were shared with the guests. Brief contributions were made by: Bishop Homeyer, Bishop Nicora, M. D. Viénot (President of Caritas Europa), Mme. Maria Martens (Member of the European Parliament; President of the European Laity Forum), Bishop Maly (CZ), Bishop Muszynski (PL) and Archbishop Seregély (HU). The meeting was also briefed on the project of a Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU by Mr. G. de Kerchove, Director at the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers and by M. C. Ladenburger, a specialist in Human Rights and religious liberty issues in the same secretariat. The meeting encouraged the secretariat to pursue its preparation of a proposal to the Group tasked with drafting the Charter. This Autumn Plenary marked the completion of two mandates on the part of the President, Bishop J. Homeyer and the Vice-Presidents Archbishop F. Franck and Archbishop E. Yanes Alvarez. The Plenary meeting therefore held elections. Bishop J. Homeyer was re-elected as President and Bishop A. van Luyn and Bishop A. Nicora were elected Vice-Presidents.

1.4. THE SECRETARIAT: STAFF

- 1.4.1. All members of the secretariat staff contributed to preparing and achieving the activities described 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 exchange of information among staff members.
- 1.4.3. Enquires were made and interviews conducted to fill the position of journalist and press officer vacated in July. An appointment was made in late July. In consultation with the COMECE secretariat the Italian Bishops' Conference nominated a staff member to work on its behalf within COMECE, whilst also working for COMECE. Having been successful in a recruitment competition, one of the secretaries left at the end of the year to work at Eurocontrol.
- 1.4.4. In view of the forthcoming enlargement of the European Union discussions were held with the President of the Polish Bishops' Conference with a view to finding a Polish staff member for the secretariat. He will join the secretariat in May 2000 and will have responsibility inter alia for contacts regarding enlargement issues with the Episcopal Conferences of central and eastern Europe.

1.5. THE SECRETARIAT: WORKING GROUPS

- 1.5.1. The **Legal Affairs Working Group** met on 11 February and 10 November. The meetings began with brief reports on juridical matters of current concern to the Church in the Member States represented. The February meeting concentrated on article 13 (non-discrimination) of the Treaty of Amsterdam. Input on the subject and on the Vienna colloquium on anti-discrimination (03-04 December 1998, where COMECE was represented) was provided by M. J-P Tricart, an official of D.G.V. of the European Commission. The November meeting concentrated on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, providing comment and input for a contribution on behalf of COMECE to the Group tasked with preparing the Charter. The group also considered ways of reintroducing respect for the Sunday rest in the context of the revision of the directive on the organisation of working time. The group also surveyed recent developments in regard to article 13 (non-discrimination)
- 1.5.2. The **Reflection Group on Bio-ethical issues** held two meetings during the course of the year. At its session of 04 March the members of the group focused on ethical issues arising from xenotransplantation. As in the past, the results of this first 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. The second meeting, held on 12 November, initiated the planning of a colloquium on bioethical issues for the second half of 2000. This initiative will involve specialists invited by the Working Group, civil servants of the EU institutions and Members of the European Parliament.
- 1.5.3. **The Working Group on Social Affairs**, presided by Bishop A. van Luyn, met on 19-20 February and on 05-06 November. *The introduction of more flexibility in working*

time: social, cultural and religious implications was chosen as the theme for the February meeting. Input was Mr. V. Sylveste on behalf of the European Commission and by M. le Baron Jacobs, President of UNICE from the employers perspective. Mr. A. Britton, an economist and executive secretary of a significant report to the Churches in the United Kingdom entitled, *Unemployment and the Future of Work, An Enquiry for the Churches* and Mrs. Christina Klenner, Hans-Böckler Foundation, representing the Trade Union viewpoint, animated the deliberations on the future of work and leisure. At its meeting on 05-06 November the group took as its working theme, *The ethical dimensions of the new WTO Round*. Presentations were given by: M. E. Gabaglio (ETUC), Mr.H-F. Beseler, Director General at Directorate General Commerce of the European Commission, Mr. R. Felke from the German Ministry of Economics, M. C. Sayag, from the European Commission's Directorate General for Commerce and Fr. D. Peccoud S.J. special advisor for socio-religious issues at the ILO. At the November Plenary meeting the mandate of the Working Group was confirmed for a further three years and Bishop van Luyn agreed to continue as chairman.

- 1.5.4. The **Working Group on Media** convened on 25 March and on 22 November. A significant presentation on the ethics of media was given to the March meeting by Dr. B. Patijn (KUL). A report on the chief activities of the Working Group was prepared for the CEEM meeting in Barcelona/Montserrat (08-10 April) and issues for discussion with Commissioner M. Oreja at that meeting were also identified. At its meeting on 22 November the Group concentrated on media issues on the WTO agenda.
- 1.5.5. At its meeting on 25-26 March the **Working Group on Islam in Europe** considered a first draft of a document on the integration of Muslims in Europe. Mr. T. Ericsson, counsellor at the Permanent Representation of Sweden to the EU gave a report on the Euro-Islam project launched by the Swedish government in 1994, whilst Dr. T. Jansen, a member of the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission, gave a briefing on a comparative study project initiated by the Forward Studies Unit on the presence of Muslims in Europe. Dr. Jansen undertook to keep the group informed of the advance of this project and requested specialist input from members of the group. At this meeting the Working Group finalised two projects for submission to the Barcelona process, the first a seminar for mayors of towns with a significant Muslim population, the second a seminar on Christian-Islamic dialogue for journalists. Because of the need for support for projects from four governments among the twenty seven participating countries and due to a certain blockage on religious issues, neither project proved viable under the current pre-conditions governing the Barcelona process. At its sitting on 13-14 November the Group worked on a second draft of the proposed document on the integration of Muslims in Europe. Destined for the services of the national Bishops' Conferences it should be available in the course of 2000. Dr. M. Köhler, DG Relex of the European Commission, gave a report on the Barcelona process. Mr. S. Biller, advisor to the EPP Group in the European Parliament, gave input on the EPP Group's work on Islam in Europe. The Group gave particular attention to the candidacy of Turkey for EU membership. On this subject input was given by M. Simmonet, D.G. Enlargement, Turkey Desk, of the European Commission and by Dr. T. Jansen, the European Commission's Forward Studies Unit. On the basis of the discussion and as a result of other enquiries addressed to the COMECE secretariat from Members of the European Parliament and EU civil servants

regarding the Turkish candidacy, the Working Group decided to plan a seminar for specialists and EU personnel. This subject will be developed by the Group in early 2000.

- 1.5.6. The COMECE **Platform on Migration** issues convened on 25 June on 08 September and also on 29 November. The meetings were attended by representatives of Catholic Church offices in Brussels working on migration related issues and by representatives of the services of the national Bishops' Conferences dealing with such issues at the national level. The June meeting took as its theme: *The Asylum and Immigration Policy of the European Union with a view to the Extraordinary EU summit at Tampere (15-16 October)*. Three presentations were made on the proposed programme for Tampere. The contributions were made by Mr. R. Eksymä, Counsellor for Justice and Home Affairs at the Permanent Representation of Finland to the EU, by M. J-L. de Brouwer, Director of the External frontiers, Immigration, Asylum Department within the Task Force Justice and Home Affairs at the General Secretariat of the European Commission and by Dr. W-R. Born, from the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and President of the High Level Working Group of the Council on "Asylum and Migration". At the sitting on 08 September the Platform continued its work of preparing a submission to the Tampere summit. On 20 September a submission was made on behalf of the COMECE secretariat to Commissioner Vittorino, to Mr. Lipponen, Prime Minister of Finland, and to Mr. P. Järvio, Tampere co-ordinator for the Finnish government. At its November meeting the Group focused on a range of subjects: family reunion, irregular immigration in the Member States, the "eurodac" system (comparison of fingerprints of asylum seekers) and on possible forthcoming European Commission proposals on matters such as, temporary protection, the legal basis for a European refugee fund and complementary or subsidiary protection status.
- 1.5.7. A series of regular working sessions with the financial advisers assisted the secretariat in managing the annual budget. On 06-07 December a meeting of the financial advisors of the Member Bishops' Conferences of COMECE was held at the secretariat in Brussels. The Episcopal Conferences of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain were represented. The statement of accounts for 1998 and the summary of assets and liabilities for 1998 were examined. The functioning of the key, established in December 1997, to regulate the contributions of the Episcopal Conferences to the annual COMECE budget was discussed. Provisions were made for the years 2001 and 2002.
- 1.5.8. The Working Groups maintained contact with Church-linked offices in Brussels, especially with CARITAS, CIDSE, ESPACES, OCIPE, Justice and Peace. Reports of their work were sent to the secretariats and services of the national Bishops' Conferences.

2. COMECE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

- 2.1. The Plenary meetings 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 the members of the Working Groups. The COMECE secretariat was contacted on occasion by Members of

the European Parliament and by civil servants of the EU institutions in search of a Church viewpoint on matters relating to European policy.

- 2.2. During his visit to Brussels on 29 September the President, Bishop Homeyer, was accompanied by Bishop A. Nicora and by staff members of the secretariat. He met with Mr. E. Brok, Member of the European Parliament and President of the European Parliament's Committee of Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy. Their discussion included the composition of the newly elected European Parliament, enlargement, the forthcoming intergovernmental conference, security and defence policy. The meeting with the President of the European Commission took place some two weeks after the formal inauguration of the new European Commission. In the course of his meeting with President Prodi, Bishop Homeyer presented the mission and work of COMECE instancing examples of its initiatives in support of European integration. Acknowledging the importance of such work on the part of the Church, President Prodi expressed his hope that the Church would continue to play its particular part in developing the understanding of European project in civil society. Enlargement was also discussed. Bishop Homeyer outlined his visits to the Orthodox Patriarchates. President Prodi pledged his support for continuing information visits by Church-linked groups from candidate countries. Bishop Nicora recalled and outlined the contents of the proposal made by Bishop Homeyer to President Santer (10.06.1998) to strengthen and develop a more systematic modus for input from the Churches to the EU institutions. This proposal was discussed in the Joint Committee between COMECE and the Commission for Church and Society of KEK in January 1999. Thereafter the proposal was presented ecumenically to the European Commission. President Prodi noted the matter and indicated that it would receive serious consideration from his services. In this context the question was also raised as to whether an "*unité*" for Church and religious affairs might not be instituted in the services of the European Commission. A further discussion was devoted to the Synod of Bishops for Europe due to begin in Rome within a few days. President Prodi, already well informed of the preparations, expressed his hopes for the Synod. Bishop Homeyer suggested that President Prodi might address his personal greetings in a letter to the Synod. Cardinal Jan P. Schotte, Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, read a letter from President Prodi to the Plenary Assembly of the Synod in the closing week of the Synod.
- 2.3. In accordance with established practice COMECE together with EECCS requested meetings with the incoming Presidencies of the EU. A meeting with the German Presidency (January-June 1999) was held on 21 December 1998. The State Secretary for European Affairs, Mr. G. Verheugen, met with a delegation made up of representatives of the local Churches, of COMECE and of EECCS. Mr. Verheugen outlined the priorities of the Presidency programme. Among the issues raised by the representatives of the Churches were – the 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 an EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the status of voluntary charitable organisations, the protection of Sunday and religious holidays. On 15 June the Prime Minister of Finland, Mr. P. Lipponen, met with representatives of COMECE, the Commission for Church and Society of KEK and of the local Churches in Finland. Mr. Lipponen set out the main lines of the programme for the Finnish Presidency (July-December 1999). Among the issues raised by the

members of the delegation from the churches were: enlargement, the Tampere summit scheduled for October 1999; minorities in Europe; the Millennium Declaration; the war in Kosovo and the possibility of involvement of the Churches with the Stability Pact for south-east Europe and in the EU Strategy for Russia; the proposed Charter of Fundamental Rights. Both meetings provided an opportunity for an exchange on the Churches' engagement with the European project, on the work of the EU institutions and signalled their interest in specific issues on the programmes of the two Presidencies.

- 2.4. In the context of their daily work, responsibility for particular policy areas, and in preparing the meetings of the Working Groups the members of the secretariat had regular contact with the services of the European Commission, its cabinets and Directorate Generals. 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 visited the secretariat and addressed the meetings of the Working Groups throughout the year.
- 2.5. Close working relations were maintained with the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission. Its staff members contributed to a range of COMECE activities inter alia: information visits to the EU on the part of Church-linked groups from the Member States such as, an official visit by Church and religious leaders from Hungary (04-05 February), to a group from the Salzgitter deanery (04 April), a catholic media group from Franche Comté (12 May), a Caritas Hildesheim group (18 May), IAE and catholic adult education specialists (14-16 June), the Standing Committee of the French Bishops' Conference (13 September), an information visit by the Catholic Academy in Fulda (14 October), an audition on EU policy for elderly persons (03 December), a study day for post-graduates in canon law from the university of Münster (10 December).
- 2.6. Staff members took part in the Briefing sessions organised by the Forward Studies Unit in the aftermath of the European Council meetings: for Vienna on 29 January, for Cologne on 09 July and for Helsinki on 17 July.
- 2.7. As in previous years the COMECE, working together with members of the Brussels office of the Commission for Church and Society (CSC) of KEK, co-organised with the Forward Studies of the European Commission a Dialogue seminar on *The Future of the European Union – African Development Co-operation: Post Lomé Perspectives*, held in Brussels on 07-08 July. COMECE and CSC called upon the International Co-operation for Development and Solidarity (CIDSE) office and upon the Development Organisations in Europe (APRODEV), two organisations of the Catholic and Reformed Churches respectively specialising in development policy, to focus the programme on crucial issues at stake in the negotiations. On 06 July the representatives of the Churches and Church-linked organisations from African countries had an opportunity to exchange viewpoints and concerns, to meet with representatives of the ACP secretariat, with African ambassadors to the EU and with officials of the European Commission.

The Dialogue seminar itself which took place on 07-08 July provided the Churches and especially the representatives of the Churches in Africa with an opportunity to engage in constructive discussions with officials working on the re-negotiation of

Lomé. The Archbishop of Kisangani, Mgr. Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, participated in the seminar as one of the representatives of the Catholic Church.

- 2.8. Immediately after the Cologne European Council (June) it was decided that a Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU should be drafted and prepared for the Nice Council at the end of the French Presidency in December 2000, the COMECE secretariat noted that a submission on the part of COMECE to the process of preparing such a Charter was necessary. Recognising also its responsibility to assist the national Bishops' Conferences in regard to the process of the preparation of the Charter, in consultation with Bishops' Conferences the secretariat established a multi-disciplinary *Think Tank* of specialists to study the parameters set out by Cologne and to prepare a draft proposal for the Group tasked with preparing the Charter. By early autumn the members of the *Think Tank* had submitted proposals for articles to the COMECE secretariat; a draft document was produced and returned to the members of the *Think Tank* for comments. The COMECE Legal Affairs Group was also consulted and involved in the preparation of the document. The COMECE draft document, consisting of proposals for twelve fundamental rights and an explanatory memorandum, will be submitted to the members of the COMECE Executive Committee in early 2000. Once approved it will be submitted to the sixty-two member Group (Convention) tasked with drafting the Charter.
- 2.9. The Plenary sessions of the European Parliament in Strasbourg were covered and reported in the monthly publication *Europe-Infos*. The proceedings of the European Parliament committees pertinent to the COMECE Working Groups were monitored by staff members. Numerous meetings between Members and officials of the European Parliament and the secretariat staff took place throughout the year.
- 2.10. The staff of the secretariat liaised with officials of the Permanent Representations of the Member States and the Missions of candidate countries for admission to the EU. Officials of various Representations addressed meetings of the Working Groups, took part in the consultation on the draft Vision Statement on the European construction and attended the soirées.
- 2.11. The COMECE secretariat was represented on the Screening Committee assisting the European Commission with the administration of the initiative *Soul for Europe: Ethics and Spirituality*. An initiative launched by President Delors towards the end of his mandate, it aims to promote and provide some financial support for projects seeking to explore the ethical and spiritual dimensions of European construction. Projects fulfilling the criteria established by the European Commission (with input from the Screening Committee) might receive co-financing under the EU budget line A-3024. The secretariat was also represented on a sub-committee tasked with preparing a second annual seminar under the aegis of this initiative. A programme was prepared and scheduled for 31 January 2000 on the theme: *Citizenship, Rights and Responsibilities: Thoughts and Contributions from Religious and Humanist Communities*. Towards the end of 1999 there were indications that the initiative might encounter certain difficulties: it had always lacked a legal base, although through intense lobbying in 1996 and 1997 members of the Screening Committee had succeeded in gaining a favourable explanatory note on the initiative in the European Parliament's comment on the EU budget.

- 2.12. Contacts were maintained with offices representing the regions of the Member States of the EU. Efforts to establish relations with and participate in the activities of some Brussels based policy centres, particularly with the European Policy Centre and with the Centre for European Policy Studies were successful.

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 at the secretariat.
- 3.2. Members of the secretariat met with members of the Dominican ESPACES team and with a staff member of the Commission for Church and Society office (CSC) to explore the possibilities of organising a second seminar with the European Commission on the cultural and societal implications of EU policy on the Information Society. At the end of the year the possibilities for such a seminar were being explored with the European Commission.
- 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, discussions and receptions was continued for invited audiences of EU civil servants and persons interested in exploring the interface between faith and European construction. Fr. P. Lebeau S.J. presented the diaries of Etty Hillesum in a soirée (21 September) entitled *Un itinéraire spirituel européen: Etty Hillesum*, setting out their anticipation of post-Auschwitz theology and their pertinence for the spiritual quest of contemporary Europeans. On the evening of 18 November during the autumn Plenary meeting a second thematic evening was organised with the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Europe as its subject. COMECE Bishops who attended the Synod together with M. D. Viénot, President of Caritas Europa and M. Martens, Member of the European Parliament, shared their experiences of the Synod with the audience. Receptions and events were also organised in Paris, Strasbourg and Dublin to launch the new version of the monthly review *Europe-Infos* in the Member States indicated.

4. INFORMATION SERVICE, PUBLICATIONS, LECTURES, CONFERENCES

- 4.1. A new series of the review *Europe-Infos* was launched in collaboration with the Jesuit Office OCIPE in January. An editorial board made up of members of the COMECE and OCIPE secretariats and of EU civil servants was established. It meets each month to plan the contents of forthcoming issues. A monthly, it is published in French, German, English and Spanish. A Polish version was planned for late 1999. The review was distributed to all Bishops in the Member States of the European Union and

the candidate countries of central and eastern Europe. it was also distributed to the services of the Bishops' Conferences and to subscribers.

- 4.2. COMECE and OCIPE organised and took part in sessions to launch the review. Two events were held in France: at the Centre Sèvres, Paris on 18 January and at the OCIPE office in Strasbourg on 9 February. A further launch was held in the conference room of the European Commission and European Parliament in Dublin on 19 April.
- 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 Bishops' Conferences to assist them in their work.
- 4.4. The COMECE text, *Truth, Memory and Solidarity: Keys to Peace and Reconciliation*, was published in eight languages, including Polish and Russian, in March. The proceedings of the Social Congress (20-21 February 1998), *The Euro and Europe: a Christian reflection on the Political and Social Implications of Monetary Union* were published by Bruylant-Academia (ISBN 2-87209-539-X).
- 4.5. 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 Bishops' Conferences and by universities and academic institutes.
- 4.6. Staff members took part in and addressed various congresses throughout Europe, for example: – a European meeting of *Mission de la Mer* in Antwerp on 13 January; the Essener Gespräche on Church-State relations on 08-09 March; a seminar on Democracy and Citizenship in Bad Honnef on 22-24 April; a conference on Islam in Europe organised by the European Parliament on 08-09 April; the annual meeting of the association of European Cellarers at the abbey of Monte Olivetto Maggiore, 23-26 April; a meeting of International Catholic Organisations in Geneva on 26-27 April; at a colloquium on the theme *Co-operative Shaping of Change* co-organised by the Hans Böckler Foundation, the Bertelsmann Foundation and the European Trade Union Institute in Brussels on 28 April; at an international conference organised by the Council of Europe on *Ethical Questions arising from the application of biotechnology* in Oviedo on 16-19 May; a conference on the *European Union and Poland: from Transformation to Accession* organised by the *Chaire Européenne Jean Monnet* of the Université Jaguillonienne, Cracow, 23-25 May; a colloquium on the Church-State relations in Europe at the Università Cattolica in Milan, 28-30 May; a conference on Catholics in Public Life in Liverpool on 08-11 July; a Summer Academy in Kloster Seeon, Bavaria on 23-27 August organised by the Bertelsmann Foundation; at a CIDSE Workshop on Bio-patenting, Brussels, 15 September; a seminar co-organised by OCIPE and the Council of Europe on Europe-China relations, Strasbourg 23 September; at the Justitia et Pax General Assembly in Vienna, 26-29 September; at the meeting of the Franco-German pastoral forum of the dioceses of Lille and Trier, held in the Catholic Academy, Trier on 19-22 October; at a seminar on *Orthodoxy and Europe* in the Collegium Borromaeum, Münster on 29-30 October; the meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Joint Bio-Ethics Committee (England and Wales, Ireland, Scotland) in Ayrshire, Scotland on 01-02 November; at the symposium in Siegen on the *European Project and Christian Identity* on 05-06 November; at a seminar on the

European Union and the Voluntary Sector, organised by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, in Brussels on 07-10 November; at the Semaines Sociales de France, 25-28 November; at an intentional symposium on relations between State and Religion in Asia and Europe organised by the KUL and the Verbiest Foundation, in Leuven, 08-10 December; an address to the BDKJ Executive Conference in Mainz on 17 December.

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 of finding 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 during the course of the year.
- 5.3. The Secretary General of COMECE monitors developments in respect of the teaching of religion in the European schools through COOPERE. This sphere of COMECE's responsibility will require attention in the coming years in the context of EU enlargement. The probable increase in pupil numbers will have consequences for the European schools' budget. It will be necessary to ensure that the provisions for the teaching of religion in these schools are maintained.

6. ECUMENICAL CONTACTS AND COLLABORATION

- 6.1. Throughout the year contacts were maintained with the secretariat of the Commission for Church and Society (CSC) of the Conference of European Churches, 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 the CSC, the COMECE 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 part of his series of visits to the Orthodox Churches, the President visited the Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk, Belaruss, 28-31 January. He had discussions with Metropolitan Filaret, with the Apostolic Nuncio, with President Lukaschenka, with the OSCE representative and with the German Ambassador. Discussions with Church representatives on the work of COMECE and on the challenges facing the Churches in Europe were mutually informative. An invitation was extended to Metropolitan Filaret to visit Brussels.
- 6.4. Throughout the year staff members received ecumenical groups from the Member States, representatives of the Anglican, Reformed and Orthodox Churches at the secretariat and briefed them on the work of COMECE.

- 6.5. The meeting of the Joint Committee between COMECE and the Commission for Church and Society (CSC) of the Conference of European Churches took place in Brussels on 28 April. The meeting surveyed the current priorities of both organisations. It worked at length on the proposal for developing relations between the Churches and the European Union, thus facilitating the drafting of an ecumenically agreed version of the proposal which was submitted to the European Commission in July.
- 6.6. Staff members took part in ecumenical prayer services in the European Parliament in Brussels on 21 April and on 28 July. 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. A member of the COMECE staff officiated with clergy of other Christian denominations at the service.
- 6.7. The President and Secretary General took part in the conference *Europe after the Kosovo Crisis: Implications for the Churches* held in Oslo on 15-16 November. At the invitation of the Secretariat of State the President of COMECE addressed the conference on behalf of the Catholic Church.

7. COLLABORATION WITH THE CCEE AND WITH BISHOPS' CONFERENCES AND THE SYNOD ON EUROPE

- 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 Athens on 11-14 November and the meeting of the General Secretaries of the Bishops' Conferences in Dubrovnik on 20-23 June.
- 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 Bishops' Conferences regarding EU policy issues were dealt with. A member of the secretariat addressed the Catholic Bishops' Joint Bio-Ethics Committee of the Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales, Ireland and Scotland on 01-02 November.
- 7.4. As a contribution to building up a sense of European identity among younger professional assistants and advisors in the services of Bishops' Conferences both in the Member States and in the candidate countries, the COMECE secretariat organised a summer university on the theme, *The Church and Contemporary Culture in Europe*, in Souvigny, France on 09-12 September. Some forty participants attended from eleven countries. Professor Dr. Picht, Director of the French-German institute gave an analysis of the contemporary cultural scenario in Europe; Bishop H. Simon shared reflections on new expressions of paganism in French and European society; a panel of speakers from different academic, cultural, linguistic and national backgrounds – Herr E. Koch, a German writer and former secretary to H. Böll; Professor Maria Dolores de Asis Garrote, Professor of literature at the Complutense University in Madrid; Rev. Fr. Dr. Robert Letellier, scripture scholar and author – examined traces of Christian spirituality in contemporary European literature. M. M. Mesquita da Cunha, a member of the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission spoke on

the EU at the service of the European cultural heritage. Dr. F. Pizul outlined the experience and functioning of the website page of the archdiocese of Milan. Bishop Pieronek's paper on the challenges facing the Church in contemporary Europe was presented and discussed. A letter outlining the conclusions was addressed to the President of COMECE in his capacity as a member of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Europe. Reference was made to its contents during the Synod. The proceedings of the summer university will be published in the course of 2000.

- 7.5. In the framework of a 1998 request by the Secretariat of State to some Bishops' Conferences to co-ordinate efforts to support the Church in the Holy Land (with particular reference to the status of Jerusalem), the COMECE secretariat maintained contact with the secretariats of the Bishops' Conference of the USA and with the representatives of those European Bishops' Conferences which attended the consultation at the COMECE secretariat in October 1998. A further meeting on the subject was held in Rome on 15 October 1999 involving the secretary General of CCEE, representatives of the Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales, France, Germany, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the United States and the General Secretary of COMECE.
- 7.6. The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Europe (01-23 October 1999) with its theme, *Jesus Christ Alive in His Church, the Source of Hope for Europe*, was attended by the President, several members of COMECE and by the Secretary General. The COMECE response to the *Lineamenta* was submitted in October 1998. The President hosted two preparatory meetings in Hildesheim in July and September. The interventions of many of the COMECE members in the plenary assemblies underlined the significance of the European project as carried forward by the EU institutions. The work and mission of COMECE received notable support from the Synod Fathers both in plenary and in the working groups. Throughout the Synod the Executive Committee members of both COMECE and CCEE remained in close contact. They took part together in press conferences and various information meetings regarding their respective missions.

8. LOOKING TOWARDS 2000

- 8.1. COMECE and its secretariat will continue to monitor European Union policy-making on behalf of the Bishops' Conferences, the Member States and the candidate countries.
- 8.2. Particular attention will be given throughout the year to the work of the Convention tasked with drafting the proposed Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. In this context the COMECE secretariat will work closely with the Apostolic Nuncio to the European Communities and with the services of the Episcopal Conferences of the Member States.
- 8.3. The draft "Vision Statement" on European construction will be completed.
- 8.4. Seminars will be held on the Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union (May) and on Ethically Responsible Research in Bio-medicine (December) involving Church specialists and EU civil servants.

- 8.6. The COMECE secretariat will maintain relations with the member Bishops' Conferences and plan information visits to the EU institutions for Episcopal Conferences requesting such visits.
- 8.7. Further initiatives to assist the Bishops' Conferences in the candidate countries to prepare for adhesion to the EU will be undertaken.
- 8.8. Further efforts will be made in collaboration with the Director and members of the OCIFE team to promote the COMECE-OCIFE monthly publication, *Europe-Infos*.
- 8.9. The series of thematic evening events will be continued.
- 8.10. A winter academy will be organised in conjunction with the November Plenary meeting.
- 8.11. The possibility of creating a COMECE website will be investigated further.

N. Treanor
March 2000