

# COMECE

## ANNUAL REPORT 2018



COMECE

COMMISSION OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCES  
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION



## FOREWORD

Dear Readers,

In 2018, we were called to transform into concrete actions the ideas and energies that emerged from the Dialogue of Rome (*Re*) *thinking Europe*.

Pope Francis reminded us that at this time, Christians are called to give new life to Europe, to reawaken its conscience “*not by occupying spaces [...] but by generating processes capable of awakening new energies in society*”.

With this exhortation in mind, in March 2018, I had the honor and the challenging task of accepting and assuming the Presidency of COMECE. In a full collegial spirit, together with the four new Vice Presidents and the Presidents of the Commissions, we have tried to promote “dialogue” as the main tool to face the transformations of our time that have a significant impact on the future of all those living in the EU and on its institutions.

Technological development and digitalisation, global warming, demography, migration: all these challenges must be faced with a constructive spirit, a commitment to solidarity, and an attention to the Creation and the common good.



*Pope Francis receives Archbishop Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ, President of COMECE (Vatican, 18 July 2018)*

# FOREWORD

07

Migration & Asylum

10

Ethics, Research & Health

13

Ecology & Sustainability

15

Legal Affairs & Fundamental Rights

18

Social & Economic Policies

21

External Action

24

Freedom of Religion

Only in the context of dialogue it is possible to exploit the opportunities offered by these challenges and to face effectively the difficulties that characterise them. The dialogue constantly proposed by the Catholic Church should not be reduced to mere formal encounters, it must be alive and pulsing, overall through the full involvement of young people who, on numerous occasions, have shown us the way by expressing their fears and needs, dreams and hopes.

I am personally committed to ensuring that the rich diversity offered by each Episcopate, together with the universal character of the Church, will accompany the EU in fully taking on its role and responsibility at the universal level, by promoting policies based on integral human development and care for Creation.

The backbone of the European project is the valuing of diversity. This aspect, however, cannot be taken for granted. On the contrary, it must be promoted and protected day by day, in every action of everyone's daily life.

With this in mind, the Bishops of COMECE have already embarked since 2018 on a path of reflection that will encourage European citizens, including those who will engage in the political competition of May 2019, to embrace an individual and collective responsibility for the common good. Whatever challenge we are called to face together, the key word is responsibility.

*Archbishop Jean-Claude Hollerich, S.J.  
President of COMECE*



Pope Francis and COMECE Standing Committee (Vatican, 18 July 2018)

## DIALOGUE WITH THE EU INSTITUTIONS

## EU-CHURCHES DIALOGUE ON THE BASIS OF ARTICLE 17 TFEU

Article 17, paragraph 3 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) provides a legal basis for an "open, transparent and regular dialogue" between the EU and Churches. This provision establishes an obligation for the EU institutions and recognises Churches' identity and specific contribution. The dialogue practices are well consolidated and were developed by Churches even before the existence of Article 17 TFEU.

On one side COMECE prioritises the strengthening of dialogue structures, tools and practices, and on the other side a dialogue on concrete policies rather than formal or symbolic events.

In 2018 the implementation of Article 17 TFEU was regularly discussed at the highest level with EU representatives, highlighting the need for a fair and equitable representation of the Catholic Church in dialogue initiatives.

An efficient cooperation was established at the working level with the new Commission Dialogue Coordinator. For the future, COMECE will support a stronger articulation between the technical and the political level within the European Commission, and better EU transparency policies.



2018 COMECE Autumn Plenary Assembly (Brussels, 25-26 October 2018)

## In dialogue with the EU Presidencies

Every semester COMECE, together with its ecumenical partners, meets with high-level representatives of the government holding the rotating Presidency of the EU Council. These meetings allow Churches to raise their concerns and perspectives on the priorities of each EU Presidency.

In collaboration with the Bishops' Conference of the Member State holding the Presidency, COMECE elaborates written contributions containing recommendations on current EU policies and legislative files.

On 8 May 2018 COMECE met in Sofia with Ekaterina Zakharieva, Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister, exchanging on the future of Europe & Youth, Western Balkans, Security & Migration, and Digital Economy.

Church representatives reaffirmed the importance of developing welcoming policies facilitating a better integration of migrants in Europe and social cohesion.

The parties agreed on the need to empower young people to fully participate in all levels of social, economic, and political life. Strong emphasis was placed on Churches' perspectives regarding the integration process of the Western Balkans.

While preparing an EU contribution to the climate change summit COP 24 in Katowice, and in view of the adoption of the UN Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees in December 2018, COMECE and its ecumenical partners discussed care for Creation and respect for migrant's human rights - two of the major concerns of Pope Francis - during a meeting with the Austrian Presidency of the EU Council in Vienna on 23 July 2018. On that occasion COMECE expressed the need to protect migrants' fundamental rights in every phase of their journey, including when returning to the country of origin.



COMECE delegation meets with the Bulgarian EU Presidency (Sofia, 8 May 2018)



Mgr. Hoogenboom, President of the COMECE Legal Affairs Commission at EP Dialogue Seminar (Brussels, 4 December 2018)



CEI President Card. Bassetti and EP President Tajani (Brussels, 22-25 April 2018)

## The contribution of member Bishops' Conferences

Bishops' Conferences are deeply rooted in local and national social realities. This peculiar feature makes them ideal vectors of citizens' concerns and needs towards the EU. As a sign of the great interest of COMECE member Bishops' Conferences for the European project, Italian and French Church delegations, with the facilitation of COMECE, visited Brussels, listening to the different concerns and sensitivities of EU representatives and sharing the perspectives of the Catholic Church on European affairs.

On these occasions, Bishops met with high-level EU representatives such as Antonio Tajani (President of the EU Parliament), Federica Mogherini (EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) and Frans Timmermans (First Vice-President of the EU Commission) - and exchanged on current EU challenges with a particular focus on migration, employment, fundamental rights, family and youth.

## COMECE President meetings with High-Level EU representatives

As part of the "open, transparent and regular dialogue" between the European Union and Churches enshrined in Article 17(3) TFEU, H.E. Mgr. Jean-Claude Hollerich, S.J., COMECE President since March 2018, met with:

- Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, on 18 April 2018;
- Mairead McGuinness, First Vice-President of the European Parliament on 10 July 2018;
- Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament on 12 September 2018.



Churches meeting with Austrian EU Presidency (Vienna, 23 July 2018)



Archbishop Hollerich SJ with Jean-Claude Juncker, President of EU Commission (Brussels, 18 April 2018)

## Dialogue on Fundamental Rights

In the context of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, COMECE contributed to the Dialogue Seminar on "Religion and Human Rights within the EU: A Shared Responsibility", held at the European Parliament on 4 December 2018 with MEPs, Churches and religious communities.

COMECE highlighted "the important responsibility of the EU institutions in preserving and promoting

the whole architecture of fundamental rights” and stated that “the hierarchisation of human rights is a grave obstacle to their promotion and protection”.

On 25-27 September 2018, in line with the constructive relations developed with the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), COMECE participated in the “Fundamental Rights Forum” organised in Vienna on the topic of “Belonging”. COMECE raised the question whether the space for the fundamental human right to freedom of religion is shrinking in the EU, and highlighted the need to base the role of Churches and religious communities in the domain of fundamental rights on the concept of «shared responsibility» instead of “shared space” between religions and human rights.

## Annual EU-religious leaders gathering

On 8 October 2018 COMECE attended the Annual High-Level EU-religious leaders gathering organised by the European Commission on the theme «The Future of Europe: addressing challenges through concrete actions”.

The COMECE delegation expressed the Catholic Church’s commitment to working with all people of good will in order to put the human person back at the core of public policies.



COMECE First Vice-President Mgr. Crociata and Mgr. Hérouard at the 2018 High-level meeting with religious leaders (Brussels, 8 October 2018)



COMECE participating in the Fundamental Rights Forum (Vienna, 25-28 September 2018)



2018 COMECE Autumn Plenary Assembly in dialogue with Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (Brussels, 25-26 October 2018)

# MIGRATION & ASYLUM

‘Welcome, protect, promote and integrate’

Pope Francis

## MIGRATION & ASYLUM

‘Welcome, protect, promote and integrate’

Pope Francis

### EU recent developments

The EU is adopting a number of legislative pieces aiming at reducing the influx of new comers to the EU, protecting borders, pre-assessing potential refugees in third countries and returning irregular migrants. Yet, the reform of the Common European Asylum System moves slowly, in particular with regard to the repartition of refugees among member states.

Most of migrants come now from Africa, where massive investments are needed to build stability and create jobs that would allow people to remain in their home country and have a dignified life.

The Church is concerned about the vulnerability of migrants and refugees, who should be considered as persons with faces, not numbers. Their human rights and dignity must be protected at any stage and in any circumstance.



Migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

© M. Sestini / Italian Navy

## Working Group on Migration & Asylum

The COMECE Working Group on Migration & Asylum is composed of experts appointed by the Bishops' Conferences. In dialogue with representatives of EU institutions, it discusses EU policies in the migration and asylum fields.

On 30 May 2018 the Working Group discussed, among other issues, the *status quo* of the Dublin regulation recast, the criminalisation of humanitarian aid and the UN Global Compacts on migration and refugees. On 22 November 2018 the Working Group exchanged views on the new European Commission's priorities in the fight against Trafficking in Human Beings, the external management of asylum applications by the EU, and the European Humanitarian Visa.



COMECE Working Group on Migration and Asylum (30 May 2018)

## Events

Together with CEC, COMECE organised a two-days meeting (2-3 May 2018) on "*Religious conversion in the process of asylum applications*" to analyse the challenge of asylum applicants converted to Christianity in EU countries during the screening process. COMECE participated in the conference "*Combatting the causes for migration through European development cooperation*" (Budapest, 17 September 2018), organised by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung-Hungary and the EPP, and in "*The origin of the migration and asylum crisis and the EU response*", organised by the European public servants association (Bucharest, 20 September 2018).



European Commission's expert during the COMECE Working Group on Migration & Asylum (Brussels, 30 May 2018)

## European Roma Platform for Roma Inclusion

Despite an improvement in some priority areas (housing, health, education, employment), Roma communities still face discrimination and anti-gypsyism undermining their full integration in the society. As part of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion led by the European Commission, COMECE participated in the 2018 Conference on "*Health and housing inequalities endured by Roma*" (8-9 October 2018) emphasising the need to tackle their ghettoization and to improve women's and children's health.

## UN Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees

Answering the call of the Holy See, COMECE endorsed the adoption of the UN Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees on December 2018, and encouraged EU member states to support them. COMECE promoted the 20 Action Points elaborated by the Migration Section of the IHD Dicastery at the EU and member states level.

The President of COMECE published a statement welcoming the adoption of the UN Global Compact on Migration.



Eugénia Costa Quaresma, expert of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference (22 November 2018)

## Contributions

### Cooperation with the Vatican Migration Section of the IHD Dicastery

COMECE has contributed to the draft of the *Church Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking* (Rome, 4-6 July 2018).

### Contributions to return policies and the Multiannual Financial Framework

COMECE, together with Catholic and ecumenical partners, published its *Contribution in view of the next Multiannual Financial Framework* (26 March 2018) and its *Comments on humane return policies in Europe* (29 May 2018).



COMECE Working Group on Migration in dialogue with Ms. Vassiliadou, EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator (22 November 2018)

## ETHICS, RESEARCH & HEALTH

*'Science requires a sense  
of ethical responsibility'*

*Pope Francis*

The proposed Horizon Europe programme beholds the European Union's vision about the future: research and innovation as one of the EU's most important thematic focuses.

Fast technological innovations, a developing health sector and the strong focus on digitalisation are impacting our everyday lives and societies. It is thus necessary to analyse the ethical implications of these time-changing processes and shape them through the Christian anthropology.

### Promoting safety and responsibility on the road

Every year, road traffic accidents are the cause of over 30,000 deaths - transforming our roads into battlefields - affecting not only the victims, but also their families, communities and the society as a whole. COMECE welcomed the Road Safety Programme, adopted by the European Commission to reduce road deaths in Europe, and also supported the "European Day Without a Road Death" (EDWARD).



Experts of the Working Group on Ethics (Brussels, 2 October 2018)

## COMECE Working Group on Ethics

Following last year's enlargement of the mandate and renewed setting of the COMECE Working Group on Ethics, specific *ad-hoc* working groups focusing on the ethical implications of current EU topics were created, allowing greater flexibility as well as a cross-cutting exchange amongst experts. An assembly of the Working Group on Ethics is held every year. The Group is counselled by Prof. Antonio Autiero.

On this occasion, EU Bishops launched a video campaign promoting responsibility on the road, inviting us all - drivers, bikers and pedestrians alike - to reflect on our behaviors and attitudes and to always consider the road as a shared place of our society.

Convinced that the development of new defence technologies should go hand in hand with the elaboration of a common ethical and anthropological framework, COMECE established an *ad-hoc* working group coordinated by Prof. Dominique Lambert (University of Namur) with a focus on armed drones and their ethical implications.

### Ethical implication of new Defence Technologies

In the context of the new European Defence Fund, COMECE highlighted the need for a deeper reflection on the related legal, security, humanitarian and ethical implications of new defence technologies such as armed drones at EU level.

### Digital Ethics

New technologies based on Artificial Intelligence (AI) are reshaping our day-to-day life; questioning our main principles in defining the relationship between human persons and robots. Aligned with the social teaching of the Church, COMECE recalled the unlimited equal value of each human life and underlined the need for a rights-based, person-centered approach in facing the challenges of digital technologies.



Annual Assembly of the Working Group on Ethics (Brussels, 2 October 2018)

## Horizon Europe

The Horizon Europe programme is a 7-year planned scientific research initiative carried out by the EU to raise the spending level in the field to approximately € 100 billion between 2021 to 2027, replacing the current Horizon 2020 programme.

COMECE monitored the possible ethical implications of this initiative very closely during the drafting and negotiating processes. Pursuing the no-funding policy of the EU of any activities intending to create human embryos solely for the purpose of research, of any activities aiming human cloning for reproductive purposes and of any activities intended to modify the genetic heritage of human beings.



Prof. A. Autiero, Counselor of the Working Group on Ethics (Brussels, 2 October 2018)



Prof. E. Agius, Member of the European Group on Ethics (Brussels, 2 October 2018)

## Contributions

**April 2018**

Contribution of COMECE to the consultations on EU funds in the area of investment, research and investment, SMEs and single market.

**July 2018**

Contribution of COMECE to the consultation of the European Data Protection Supervisor on Digital Ethics

## Events

**April 2018**

Meeting of the ad-hoc working group on Robotisation of life

**June 2018**

Meeting on New Defence Technologies

**October 2018**

Meeting of the Working Group on Ethics

# ECOLOGY & SUSTAINABILITY

*'The urgent challenge to protect our common home'*

*Pope Francis*

## ECOLOGY & SUSTAINABILITY

*'The urgent challenge to protect*

*our common home'*

*Pope Francis*

In recent years sustainability attracted greater attention from EU stakeholders. This is especially true for areas that are directly noticeable to people, such as circular economy, food waste and the ban on the use of disposable plastic packaging, but also for topics closely linked with lifestyle and with the sensitive question of food production/agriculture like energy transition, mobility, finance industry and nutrition.

All these issues are interconnected with each other. When looking for solutions it is clear that we need to rethink our understanding of wealth, and change our consumer-oriented and lavishly-non-sustainable lifestyle.

Since the publication of Pope Francis' encyclical "Laudato Si" in June 2015, COMECE increasingly addressed these issues encouraging the necessity of a change of mindset and lifestyle.

### Food Waste

An estimated 88 million tons of food are wasted in the EU each year, more than half of it occurring in European households. On average, every European is throwing away about 2 kg of food per week. Facing this challenge, in June 2018 COMECE gathered representatives from producers, processors, distributors, consumers and food banks in order to reflect and to propose policy solutions on how to reduce food waste in the chain from producer to consumer.

### Sustainable Finances

In June 2018 COMECE, together with its partners, organised the first "Laudato Si Reflection Day" on the subject of "Sustainable Finances".

Participants discussed on the relevant EP report as well as on the publication of the European Commission's Sustainable Action Plan. The discussion was supplemented by examples of Church actors - Bishops' Conferences, dioceses and religious communities - trying to organise their own finances according to the principles of sustainable finance.

This subject was taken up again together with Justice&Peace Europe in November 2018 during an expert meeting focused on the new dedicated department of the European Commission. On this occasion, participants expressed their concerns for those small banks pioneering in sustainable finance but suffering from competitive disadvantages due to the heavy demands of the European Commission. These banks risk to come under the wheels of big banks that have discovered "sustainability as a lucrative business" but do not truly apply sustainable principles.

## Agriculture and Rural Development

In the field of "Sustainability, Agriculture and Rural Development", COMECE, together with Christian rural movements, organised a multi-day seminar in September 2018 as part of the Erasmus + «ProRure» project, highlighting the need for policies supporting EU rural areas to meet the wide range of social, economic and environmental challenges of the 21st century.



"Quo Vadis Rural Area in Europe" Seminar with Mgr. A. Hérouard, President of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission (Brussels, 24-27 September 2018)

## COP24

Mgr. Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ, President of COMECE, together with all the other presidents of continental Bishops' Conferences, called all policy makers to work towards an ambitious implementation of the Paris Agreement in order to limit global warming to 1.5 °C and avoid the worst impacts on the Earth as argued by climate scientists.

COMECE worked closely with the Holy See in preparations for the Vatican event marking the third anniversary of the Encyclical "Laudato Si" in July 2018 and, overall, for the 2018 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 24), organised in Katowice in December 2018.

In addition to contributions to the climate summits in Paris 2015 and Katowice in 2018, COMECE repeatedly invited all stakeholders to address sustainability issues and, for the future, to link different subject areas with sustainability - such as education, both at school and at university.

# LEGAL AFFAIRS & FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

*'EU law and its impact on the life of the Church'*

## LEGAL AFFAIRS & FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

*"EU law and its impact*

*on the life of the Church"*

In the year of the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, COMECE recalled that fundamental human rights are universal and inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. Human rights are not conceded by governments, they derive from the inherent human dignity of each person. Governments must protect and promote them.

Data protection and Non-Discrimination continued to be the core of COMECE activities in this domain. Furthermore, in the context of the 2019 European Elections, COMECE introduced the topic of Fake News in its reflections, and will further develop it in the coming years.

### Fundamental Rights

For COMECE, questioning single rights (e.g. attempts to criminalise circumcision in Europe) leads to jeopardising the whole architecture of Fundamental Rights.

Extensive internal reflection was devoted to EU Court jurisprudence of relevance for the Church: e.g. cases on Church and labour law (*Egenberger* and *IR*), protection of personal data (*Jehovan todistajat*) and marriage (*Coman*).

Concerning the "Rights & Values Programme", the importance of funding for inter-religious dialogue, religious literacy and remembrance/historical memories was emphasised.

COMECE also strengthened its relations with the Brussels Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and with the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), providing a substantial contribution to the Fundamental Rights Forum 2018.

### Data Protection

The EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) became directly applicable in the Member states in May 2018 and includes a number of provisions impacting on Churches.

Following up to its internal Guidance document, in 2018 COMECE kept providing assistance to its member Bishops' Conferences in updating their internal rules, as well as on specific legal questions.

COMECE also took measures to comply internally with the requirements of the new EU Regulation. The development of an internal network of data protection Bishops' Conference experts is currently in progress.

## Fake News and Online Disinformation

Spreading Pope Francis' Message for World Communications Day 2018, COMECE contributed to the European Commission consultation on Fake News and Online Disinformation.

The submission underlined that relevant policies should be based on the rule of law and fundamental rights - with particular reference to freedom of expression, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right of parents to educate their children in conformity with their religious convictions.

Education to media, awareness of diversity and critical spirit were highlighted.

COMECE also promoted the centrality of human intervention in case of recourse to Artificial Intelligence in tackling Fake News, a proactive use of EU funds and the enhancement of the East Stratcom Task Force.



EP conference on "Religious rituals and fundamental rights" (10 April 2018)



Legal Affairs Commission (15 October 2018)



EP Dialogue Seminar "Religion and Human Rights within the EU: A Shared Responsibility" (4 December 2018)



The Legal Affairs Commission in dialogue with representatives of the European Commission (15 October 2018)

## Legal Affairs Commission

The COMECE Legal Affairs Commission monitors EU initiatives, prepares contributions and carries out a dialogue with the European Institutions mainly in areas impacting on Church activities (e.g. non-discrimination; data protection; Article 17 TFEU). The Commission also provides a place of reflection and coordination among the Bishops' Conferences on legal matters. It is composed of experts mandated by COMECE member Bishops' Conferences.

## Contributions

**6 February 2018**

Statement on criminalisation of circumcision

**22 February 2018**

Contribution to the European Commission consultation on "Fake news and online disinformation"

**26 February 2018**

Contribution to the European Commission consultation on "EU funds in the area of values and mobility"

**20 June 2018**

Contribution to the ad hoc EEAS consultation on the Draft Non-discrimination Guidelines (internal)

**10 December 2018**

Statement on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

## Events

**10 April 2018**

EP Conference on "Religious rituals & fundamental rights"

**4 December 2018**

EP Dialogue Seminar on "Religion and Human Rights within the EU - A Shared Responsibility"



Legal Affairs Commission (20 March 2018)



H.E. Mgr. Hoogenboom and Fr. Poquillon op

## SOCIAL & ECONOMIC POLICIES

*'Promoting a Europe that is an inclusive community'* Pope Francis to Comece

Digital and ecological transformations are deeply changing our society and economy, facilitating the emergence of new forms of employment crossing the classical line between 'employers' and 'employees' and challenging our understanding as well as the conditions of work in Europe. COMECE encourages the EU to create space for dialogue in order to shape these transformation as to ensure that everybody will benefit from them.

### Shaping the Future of Work towards the Common Good

In this context and in view of the 2019 European elections, COMECE published the reflection "Shaping the Future of Work", calling for a common European vision that puts people care for Creation first in the current technological and ecological shift of the economy.

Beyond the general function of work as a "source of income", COMECE promotes a holistic understanding of labour as an integral part of human identity: work can help people to find their place in society, to foster their personal development and to care for Creation by making the common house more fruitful for the next generations.

While the shift within the world of work provides new opportunities, it also comes with challenges undermining the potential of work as contributor to the common good: job polarisation is increasing, new forms of employment require a general rethinking of the welfare state, the line between professional and private life is disappearing.

Based on this analysis, the COMECE Social Affairs Commission, in dialogue with Christian movements and organisations, elaborated recommendations that call the EU to work towards a common vision of a decent, sustainable and participative world of work for all.

Mgr. Antoine Hérouard, President of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission, presented the reflection during the conference that COMECE organised in November 2018 together with its faith-based partners, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and

## Social Affairs Commission

The Commission on Social Affairs monitors and prepares statements, contributions and activities related to EU social and economic policies. The Commission gathered twice (June and November) to analyse the impact of the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework on the activities of the Church and to draft the Future of Work Statement. The Commission exchanged on the EU proposal on Work-Life Balance, highlighting the need for public policies supporting families in the current changing world of work.

the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). This event gathered 200 representatives of Christian, Jewish and Muslim organisations from 34 countries, and contributed to the ILO centenary initiative on the future of work.

time for religious, social and civic engagement - during the February 2018 MEPs breakfast meeting organised with its partners of the European Sunday Alliance at the European Parliament.

### Work-Life Balance: towards family-oriented EU policies

COMECE contributed to the negotiations of the EU Work-Life Balance Directive aiming at strengthening the protection of families in Europe. Together with its Church-based partners, COMECE advocated for stronger family-oriented policies and especially supported the EU initiative to introduce a minimum standard on leave arrangements that allow EU citizens to care of for elder and dependent family members. COMECE highlighted these elements - including the importance of adequate

### Strengthening the voice of the youth

In the year of the Synod on Young People, COMECE hosted a first forum of dialogue between Catholic Youth organisations in Europe in order to foster the active involvement of young people in giving fresh impetus to the European project. Meetings with Catholic youth organisations provided useful elements for COMECE's contribution on the European Solidarity Corps and the new Erasmus programme.



COMECE Social Affairs Commission (26 November 2018)

## COMECE at the German Catholic Day

2,000 people participated in a panel discussion on the future of Europe and the Eurozone co-organised, by COMECE within the context of the "German Catholic Day" in Münster, Germany, in May 2018. This occasion allowed participants to exchange on ways to strengthen the EU as a project for peace, reconciliation and shared prosperity.



German Catholic Day In Münster.  
MEP Ska Keller and Card. Marx (11 May 2018)

## Contributions

- **5 November 2018**  
"Shaping the future of work - reflection of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission"
- **26 March 2018**  
COMECE contribution to the next Multiannual Financial Framework

## Events

- **27 November 2018**  
"Shaping the future of work - a faith-based contribution to the ILO Centenary Initiative"
- **26 November 2018**  
Autumn meeting of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission
- **7 June 2018**  
First Laudato Si' reflection on sustainable financial systems in Europe
- **14-15 June 2018**  
Populism and re-nationalism - a test for Europe and its democracies
- **10 July 2018**  
COMECE "Spring" Social Affairs Commission
- **11 May 2018**  
In Diversity Divided - flagship event on the future of Europe of the German Catholic Day (Deutscher Katholikentag)
- **22 February 2018**  
"A Question of Time - Volunteering, social and civic engagement in a connected society", MEP breakfast meeting in the framework of the European Sunday Alliance



Mr. Baussand (Eurofound), Mr. Jahier (EESC),  
Mgr. Hollerich (COMECE). (27 November 2018)



Interreligious conference on the Future of Work. (27 November 2018)



Youth representatives during a preparatory meeting  
on the Youth Synod (April 2018)

## EXTERNAL ACTION

Towards people-, family- and community-centered partnerships

## EXTERNAL ACTION

Towards people-, family- and community-centered partnerships

Being a key concern for European citizens, the EU is dedicating an increased attention to its Security and Defence policy. In the Church understanding, security is essential since it protects human life and dignity. True security can only exist in sustainable peace which requires the establishment of an order based on social justice, integral human development, respect for human rights and on the care for Creation. Within the EU external policies, COMECE promotes an integrated approach enhancing cross-sectoral coordination and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

## A solidarity bridge between the Church in the EU and Latin America

In preparations for the 2019 Pan-Amazon Synod, in September 2018 COMECE hosted a Church delegation from Latin America. The visit included bilateral meetings and a dialogue event on the current situation in the region, with particular emphasis on the respective role the Church and the EU can play in addressing the human rights, socio-economic and environmental challenges.

Particular attention was given to the EU involvement in the negotiations of a UN binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights, which could contribute to promote indigenous peoples' rights by reinforcing private companies' responsibility.



Rosildo da Silva, indigenous representative from the Pan-Amazon region

A month later, COMECE facilitated the exchange between the Presidency of the Colombian Bishops' Conference and EU officials on the current peace process in Colombia. The discussions mainly focused on the situation of human rights defenders and of internally displaced persons (IDPs), as well as on the influx of refugees from Venezuela and the prospects for socio-economic development.

## EU-ACP: a fair & people-centered partnership

In view of the negotiations between the EU and the group of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP), COMECE brought together faith-based actors and policy makers to reflect on ways of future cooperation between these regions. Instead of a mere donor-recipient relationship, COMECE encourages efforts towards a fair, comprehensive and responsible partnership prioritising the needs of persons, families and communities.

## The EU integration of the 'Western Balkans'

Following the European Strategy for the Western Balkans, the EU perspective of this region of South-East Europe gained a new momentum. In dialogue with regional Catholic Church authorities, COMECE elaborated a contribution offering some reflections on the European integration process of the region ahead of the Sofia Summit (May 2018).

Entitled "Western Balkans' European Integration – A promise of peace and a source of development?", the document highlights the active role of Churches and religious communities in promoting human development and lasting peace.

In June 2018, H.E. Mgr. Ladislav Nemet SVD (Serbia), President of the International Bishops' Conference of St. Cyril and Methodius, visited the EU institutions, reinforcing the messages promoted in the COMECE document.

## The new defence technologies and their implications for human security

In the context of the discussions around the European Defence Fund, COMECE gathered EU, military, academia and Church representatives to reflect on the priority areas in the fields of defence research and technology development. Assessing the related legal, security, humanitarian and ethical implications, COMECE stressed the need for a deeper reflection about the long-term goals of the European security and defence policy.

These strategic objectives should be rooted in a rights-based approach and oriented towards lasting human security. The development of new defence technologies should go hand in hand with the elaboration of a common ethical and anthropological reference framework.



Parliament President Tajani with H.E. Mgr. Norvila, H.E. Mgr. Urbina Ortega, Mgr. Henao, Fr. Poquillon



Official visit of the Presidency of the Colombian Bishops' Conference to Brussels. H.E. Mgr. Urbina Ortega and Mgr. Henao (10-11 October 2018)

## Commission on the External Relations of the EU

The Commission monitors and prepares statements, contributions and activities to the EU-policy and public debate on areas of EU's External Action, such as Security&Defence, Development, Neighborhood, Human Rights and Trade.

The Commission met on 9-10 October 2018 and exchanged with EU officials on the challenges and opportunities for the EU External Action in the fields of Peace and Security, EU's Southern Neighbourhood and Trade policy.

## Contributions

- **23 February 2018**  
A contribution to the public consultation on future EU funds in the area of security and defence
- **April 2018**  
A contribution on the Western Balkans' EU Integration

## Events

- **16 May 2018.** COMECE together with the Conference of European Churches, the Quaker Council for European Affairs and the Baha'i International Community organised a meeting with faith-based actors and policy-makers on the concept of « partnership » in view of the EU-ACP negotiations on the Post-Cotonou framework.
- **14 June 2018.** COMECE and the European Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung or-

ganised a lunch event where representatives of the Church, youth and EU institutions exchanged perspectives on the path towards Western Balkans' EU integration.

- **19 June 2018.** COMECE organised a round-table debate with representatives of the EU, the military, academia and the Church on "New Defence Technologies" and on related legal, security and ethical questions.
- **20 September 2018.** COMECE and other partners organised a lunch event on the current situation in the Amazon region, with a particular emphasis on human rights of indigenous peoples, as well as on pertinent socio-economic and environmental challenges.
- **11 October 2018.** COMECE together with CID-SE, Caritas Germany, Bread for the World, and Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe organised in co-operation with MEPs a dialogue breakfast in the European Parliament with the Presidency of the Colombian Bishops' Conference on the topic of the local peace process.



COMECE Commission on the External Relations of the EU (Brussels, 9-10 October 2018)

## FREEDOM OF RELIGION

*“Religious freedom is the liberty to live, both privately and publicly, according to the ethical principles resulting from found truth”.*

*(Pope Francis)*

Freedom of religion in third countries is deteriorating and EU institutions regularly denounce this situation. Adopted in 2013, the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion remain generally unapplied. The appointment of a EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion in third countries is a positive step, but its mandate and resources should be upgraded. COMECE encourages the EU to give centrality to the protection and promotion of this fundamental right in its external policies, including its development and cooperation work.

### Freedom of Religion in third countries

COMECE alerted EU authorities on crisis situations in the Central African Republic, Nicaragua and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the Church has been under attack, and follows closely the developments on freedom of religion in other countries, such as Pakistan or the Middle East region.



H.E. Mgr. Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States (Holy See) and Prof. Decaux (Strasbourg, 10 September 2018)

Concerning Syria, COMECE hosted a breakfast meeting on “Christians of Syria: survival and hope through the Universal Church” together with regional Bishops. COMECE supports the Catholic Church’s request to take into account the negative humanitarian consequences of some EU sanctions. EU Member States should apply the humanitarian exceptions to the import/export restrictions of certain goods and services foreseen in Council Regulation 36/2012.

### Churches as actors of development

The Church is a prominent global actor in promoting integral human development, accompanying and enhancing people’s and communities’ resilience. In order to raise awareness of this reality within the EU institutions, COMECE participated in the European Development Days highlighting the positive contribution of religious institutions especially in empowering women and local communities in all spheres of life, including work, education and political rights.



Mgr. Tobji, Maronite Archbishop of Aleppo (Brussels, 26 June 2018)

### Religious conversion of asylum seekers

Asylum applicants converting to Christianity during the asylum process represent a challenge for Churches addressed by COMECE in a two-days meeting (2-3 May 2018) where participants highlighted the importance of Churches autonomy in this regard, and the need to enhance the cooperation with public authorities for the protection of those asylum seekers at risk of religious persecution in their countries of origin.

### Events

- **13 June**  
Stakeholders meeting, organised by the EEAS, with the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion.
- **16 May**  
“Integration: Navigating Religion, Identity and Conflict”, co-organised by COMECE with Las Casas Institute (Oxford University) and Saint Mary’s University.

JANUARY		FEBRUARY		MARCH		APRIL		MAY	
9	Visit of the Sternsinger	2	Visit of a delegation of the Finnish Lutheran Church	7	COMECE Standing Committee meeting	3	J&P Pilgrimage for Europe	3	Meeting on the Conversion to Christianity in asylum procedures
15	Meeting of the task force for the ecumenical conference on future of work	4>7	Visit of the Westminster parliamentary interns of the CBCEW	7>9	COMECE Spring Assembly	10	ECJJ-COMECE Conference on religious rituals and fundamental rights	8	Meeting with the Bulgarian EU Council Presidency
29	Meeting of the General Secretaries of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU	13	Ecumenical Brainstorming meeting on "From Aid to Partnership for: migration, development & peace"	9	CCEE-CEC Joint committee	18	Meeting of the European Social Week	14	Closed door meeting faith-based actors and policy-makers on partnerships in the EU-ACP context
31	Conference on European Christian Heritage	15	Visit of the President of the Bishops' Conference of Burundi	19	Visit of a group of Young Christians from the Middle East and Africa	23>25	Visit of a Delegation from the Italian Bishops' Conference	16	COMECE - Las Casas Event on Integration/Extremism
		23	Meeting of the representatives of Catholic organizations / networks in Europe engaged in migrations	20	Legal Affairs Commission	26	Visit of a delegation of the Hospitaller Order of St. John of God and of the Sisters Hospitallers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus	17>18	COMECE Standing Committee meeting in Rome
		27	Meeting with the Executive Committee of the European Committee for Catholic Education					30	Working Group on Migration and Asylum
								31	Visit of a Group from the Université Vie Active (Lyon)

JUNE		JULY		SEPTEMBER		OCTOBER		NOVEMBER		DECEMBER	
4	Visit of a group of journalist students-Katholische Journalistenschule	1	Participation to the CCEE General Secretaries Meeting	17	COMECE Standing Committee meeting	5	Participation to the Plenary Assembly of the French Bishops' Conference	3	Visit of a group of young people from Western Balkans	3	Visit of a group of young people from Western Balkans
5	COMECE Roundtable on "Food Waste"	9	COMECE President meeting with Permanent Representatives of EU States	18	Meeting with Representatives of the Orthodox Churches to the EU (CROCEU)	19	Meeting on Sustainable Finance	4	Participation to the EP Art. 17 Dialogue Seminar on Human Dignity, Human Rights, Religion – Seeking Common Ground	4	Participation to the EP Art. 17 Dialogue Seminar on Human Dignity, Human Rights, Religion – Seeking Common Ground
6	Laudato Si' Reflection Day - JP Europe - Global Catholic Climate Movement - COMECE	12	Visit of a group of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation	20	Visit of a delegation from Amazonia (REPAM)	19>20	Visit of a delegation of Bishops from Italian Region of Emilia-Romagna	4>5	Visit of a delegation of French Bishops	4>5	Visit of a delegation of French Bishops
14	COMECE - Konrad Adenauer Foundation lunch event on Western Balkans	18	Meeting of the preparatory group of the European Social Weeks	OCTOBER		21	Visit of a group of students from the Institut Catholique de Paris	6	Irish Students Visitor Group	6	Irish Students Visitor Group
19	Luncheon discussion on "New Defence Technologies"	5	Visit of Card. Barbarin and elected officials of Lyon	8	Participation to the EU High-Level Religious Leaders meeting	22	Working Group on Migration & Asylum	14	Meeting of Catholic NGOs working with the EU institutions	14	Meeting of Catholic NGOs working with the EU institutions
21	Social Affairs Commission	10	Meeting with President of the Conference of European Churches	9>10	External Affairs Commission	26	Social Affairs Commission				
26>28	Participation to the CCEE meeting of the Spokespersons of the Bishops' Conferences	13>16	Participation to the CCEE Plenary Assembly in Poznan	10>12	Visit of a delegation of the Colombian Bishops' Conference	27	Interreligious conference on the Future of Work				
				15	Legal Affairs Commission						
				23	COMECE Standing Committee meeting						
				24>26	COMECE Autumn Assembly						

## COMECE NEW PRESIDENCY

On 3 March 2018 the COMECE Assembly elected President of COMECE His Excellency Mgr. Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J., Archbishop of Luxembourg.

In the same election, the Delegates of the member Bishops' Conferences elected four Vice-Presidents: Mgr. Mariano Crociata (Italy), Mgr. Noel Treanor (Ireland), Mgr. Jan Vokál (Czech Republic), Mgr. Franz-Josef Overbeck (Germany).



Mgr. Jean-Claude Hollerich  
(Luxembourg)



Mgr. Mariano Crociata (Italy)



Mgr. Noel Treanor (Ireland)



Mgr. Jan Vokál (Czech Republic)



Mgr. Franz-Josef Overbeck (Germany)

## BISHOPS DELEGATED TO COMECE in alphabetical order

COMECE members are the Episcopal Conferences in the EU. Each member Bishops' Conference appoints a delegate Bishop to COMECE.

A single Bishop represents Denmark, Sweden and Finland. The Episcopate of the United Kingdom is represented by a Bishop of the Episcopal Conference of England and Wales, and by a Bishop of the Episcopal Conference of Scotland.

**H.E. Mgr. Virgil BERCEA**  
Bishop of Oradea Mare/Gran Varadino (Romania)



**H.E. Mgr. Mariano CROCIATA**  
Bishop of Latina (Italy)



**H.E. Mgr. Ferenc CSERHÁTI**  
Auxiliary Bishop of Esztergom-Budapest (Hungary)



**H.E. Mgr. Jorge Ferreira DA COSTA ORTIGA**  
Archbishop of Braga (Portugal)



**H.E. Mgr. Hugh (Edward) GILBERT, O.S.B.**  
Bishop of Aberdeen (Scotland)



**H.E. Mgr. Adolfo GONZALEZ MONTES**  
Bishop of Almería (Spain)



**H.E. Mgr. Mario GRECH**  
Bishop of Gozo (Malta)



**H.E. Mgr. Jozef HAL'KO**  
Auxiliary Bishop of Bratislava (Slovakia)



**H.E. Mgr. Antoine HÉROUARD**  
Auxiliary Bishop of Lille (France)



**H.E. Mgr. Jean-Claude HOLLERICH**  
Archbishop of Luxembourg (Luxembourg)



**H.E. Mgr. Theodorus C.M. HOOGENBOOM**  
Auxiliary Bishop of Utrecht (Netherlands)



**H.E. Mgr. Nicholas HUDSON**  
Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster (England & Wales)



**H.E. Mgr. Vjekoslav HUZJAK**  
Bishop of Bjelovar-Križevci (Croatia)



**H.E. Mgr. Philippe JOURDAN**  
Apostolic Administrator of Estonia



**H.E. Mgr. Jean KOCKEROLS**

 Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Malines-Brussels (Belgium)



**H.E. Mgr. Czeslaw KOZON**

 Bishop of Copenhagen (Nordic Bishops' Conference)



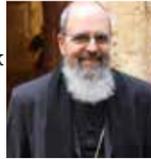
**H.E. Mgr. Franz-Josef OVERBECK**

 Bishop of Essen and Military Bishop (Germany)



**H.E. Mgr. Manuel NIN, O.S.B.**

 Apostolic Exarch to the Greek Byzantine Catholic Church (Greece)



**H.E. Mgr. Rimantas NORVILA**

 Bishop of Vilkauskis (Lithuania)



**H.E. Mgr. Christo PROYKOV**

 Apostolic Exarch of Sofia (Bulgaria)



**H.E. Mgr. Youssef SOUEIF**

 Archbishop of the Maronites (Cyprus)



**H.E. Mgr. Zbignevs STANKEVIČS**

 Metropolitan Archbishop of Riga (Latvia)



**H.E. Mgr. Janusz STEPNOWSKI**

 Bishop of Łomża (Poland)



**H.E. Mgr. Franc ŠUŠTAR**

 Auxiliary Bishop of Ljubljana (Slovenia)



**H.E. Mgr. Noel TREANOR**

 Bishop of Down and Connor (Ireland)



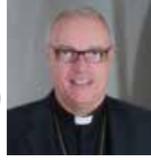
**H.E. Mgr. Jan VOKÁL**

 Bishop of Hradec Králové (Czech Republic)



**H.E. Mgr. Āgidius Johann ZSIFKOVICS**

 Bishop of Eisenstadt (Austria)



**Observers**

**H.E. Mgr. Stanislav Hočevar**

 Archbishop of Belgrade (Serbia)



**H.E. Mgr. Felix Gmür**

 Bishop of Basel (Switzerland)



## COMECE ASSEMBLIES

COMECE holds two plenary assemblies each year, which set out the main lines of its work. The Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union participates in these meetings. A seminal issue of the European integration process usually provides the core theme of each meeting.

*Spring Plenary Assembly, 7-9 March 2018 | Brussels*

Main topic: Future of Europe

*Autumn Plenary Assembly, 24-26 October 2018 | Brussels*

Main topics: Brexit, EU external affairs, youth

## MEETINGS WITH NATIONAL BISHOPS' CONFERENCES

*22-25 April 2018*

Visit of H. Em. Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, President of CEI | Brussels

*18-20 November 2018*

Visit of a delegation of Bishops from Emilia Romagna (Italy) | Brussels

*4-5 December 2018*

Visit of Bishops from the French Bishops' Conference | Brussels



*Pope Francis and COMECE Standing Committee (Vatican, 18 July 2018)*

# COMECE STAFF

The Secretariat ensures the continuity of the COMECE's work. Its headquarters are in Brussels. A small team monitors and analyses developments in EU policies and initiatives and strives to contribute to the relevant processes. The Secretariat reports to the Standing Committee and to the Plenary Assembly.

**Fr. Olivier Poquillon OP**

General Secretary

**Alessandro Calcagno**

Assistant General Secretary  
 Legal Advisor for Fundamental Rights and Article 17 TFEU issues  
 Secretary of the COMECE Legal Affairs Commission [Secunded by the Italian Bishops' Conference]

**Michael Kuhn**

Senior Advisor  
 Advisor for Ecology & Sustainability and Education, Culture and Youth policy  
 [Secunded by the Austrian Bishops' Conference]

**Stefan Lunte**

General Secretary of Justice & Peace Europe

**José-Luis Bazán**

Legal Advisor for Migration, Asylum and Freedom of Religion  
 Secretary of the COMECE Working Group on Migration and Asylum

**Marek Misak**

Policy Advisor for External Relations of the EU  
 Secretary of the COMECE Commission on the External Relations of the European Union

**Markus Vennewald**

Policy Advisor for Social & Economic Affairs  
 Secretary of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission

**Friederike Ladenburger**

Legal Advisor for Ethics, Research and Health  
 Secretary of the Working Group on Ethics

**Maud Oger**

Assistant to the General Secretary

**Alessandro Di Maio**

Communication Officer

**Carolina Ducoing**

Office Manager

**Albert Arevalo**

Support Staff

**Cynthia Quijano Aquino**

Support Staff

The Secretariat was assisted in the course of the year by voluntary interns:

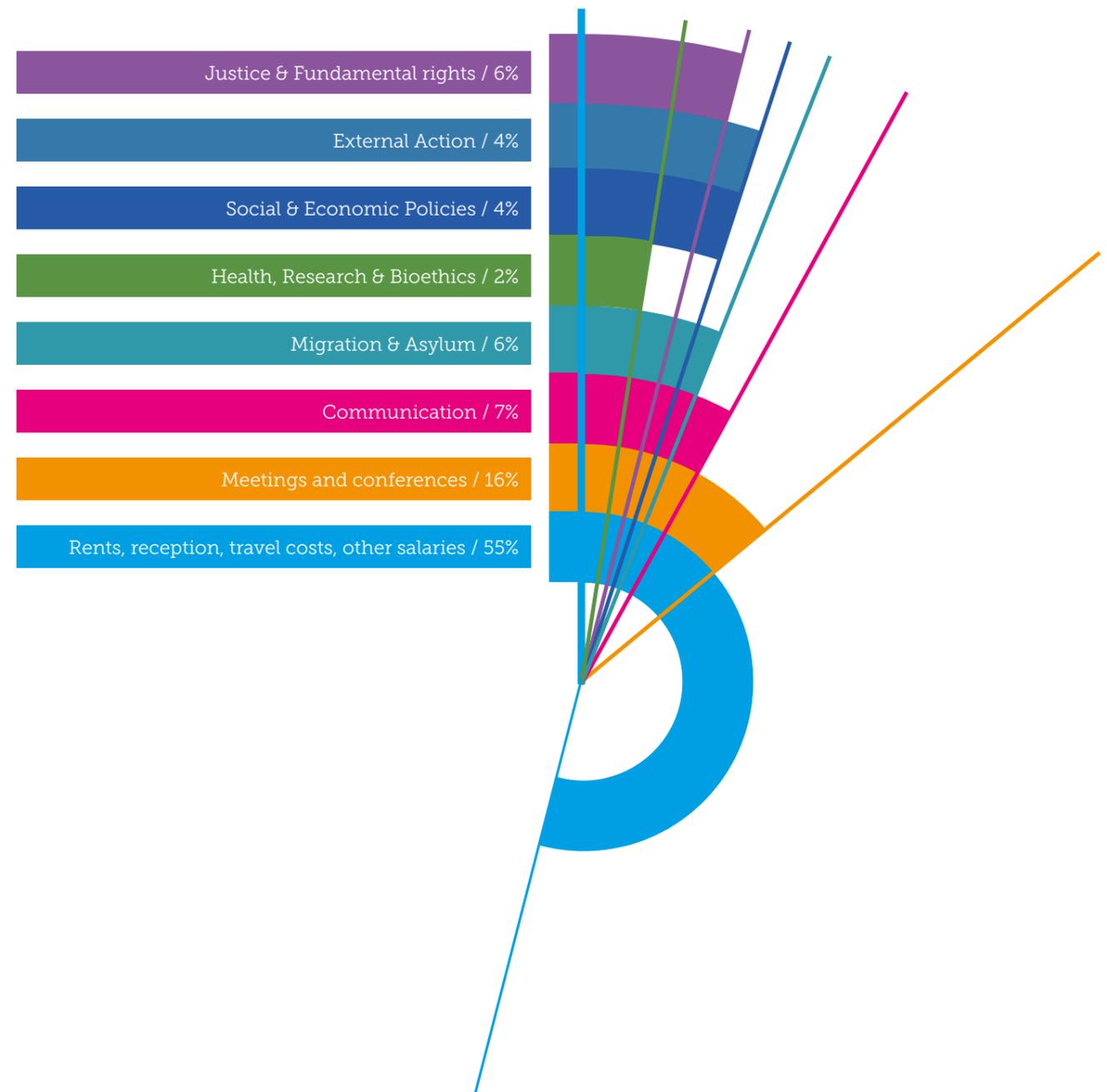
- Theresa Bachmann** (Germany)
- Gregor Christiansmeyer** (Germany)
- Carolin Moch** (Germany)
- Vojtěch Kubiš** (Czech Republic)

# FINANCES

Total expenditure: 1.189.249€

The Secretariat of COMECE and its activities are financed exclusively by the contributions of the Member Bishops' Conferences.

The Secretariat of COMECE is registered in the EU Transparency register, under the identification number 47350036909-69





[www.comece.eu](http://www.comece.eu)

19, Square de Meeûs, B-1050 Brussels

**Tel.** +32 (2) 235 05 10

**Fax** +32 (2) 230 33 34

**Mail:** [comece@comece.eu](mailto:comece@comece.eu)

