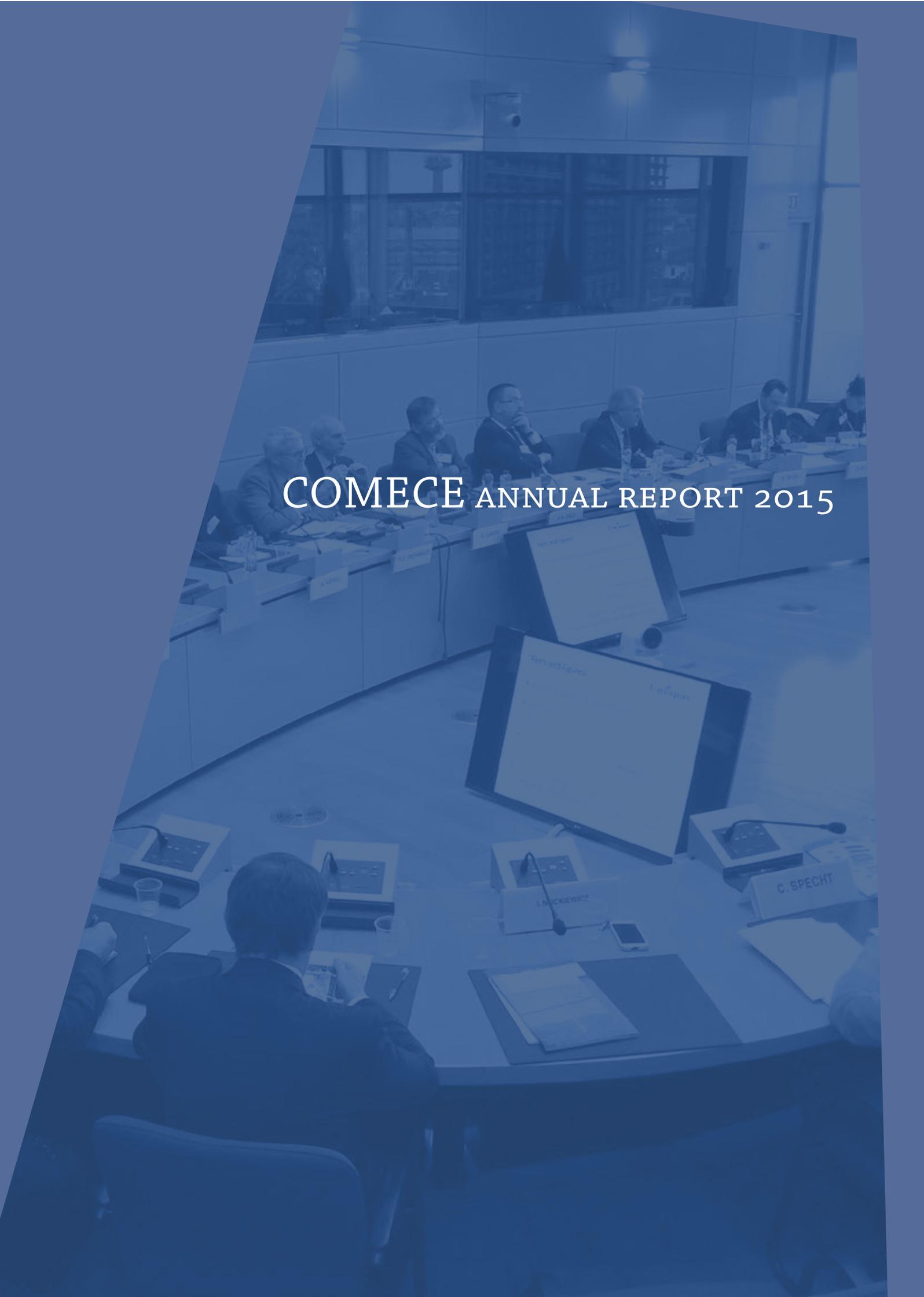


COMECE ANNUAL REPORT 2015



COMECE
COMMISSION OF THE BISHOP'S CONFERENCES
OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY



COMECE ANNUAL REPORT 2015

Ł. MICKIEWICZ

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FOREWORD

Dear Readers,

The lens through which we read the happenings of the recent past requires almost hourly re-calibration these days. Revisionist history is no longer the monopoly of the don in his musty library but the daily bread of the tabloid columnist and political analyst of public affairs. But, without a chronology of events and an itemisation of matters of record, no analysis, no interpretation – let alone revision or re-reading – is possible.

Even if the presentation grid this year is designed to match our revamped website and is, thus, new, the COMECE Annual Report 2015 provides a chronology of steady achievement, of abiding fidelity to the evolving European project and of constructive presence of the Catholic Church at the heart of EU institutional life at a time of deep political and social turbulence, which has un-nerved us all, across the continent which is our home.

The two issues which were high on the EU political agenda in 2015 occupied the attention of the COMECE Secretariat for much of the year: Migration (Refugees & Asylum Seekers), and COP 21.

Migration to, through and from Europe, has been a major issue for COMECE for many years, but this year while Church agencies and NGO's across Europe were actively involved in tackling the humanitarian and pastoral challenge of developing a culture and strategy of welcome for the huge influx of refugees and migrants, the COMECE Secretariat applied itself with equal diligence to reflecting on the more long-term challenges of integration of migrants into European society and their ownership of the project. Together with CEC and the EU Commission, the COMECE team has worked on imaginative strategies of integration so that those newly arrived on European soil, often after a traumatic journey to our shores or land borders, may learn to make our home theirs as well.

The idea of "home" was also seminal in the approach COMECE took to contributing to developing an EU position on COP 21. The encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, which introduced the idea of planet earth as a common, shared home, provided a theological framework for our thinking on the wide range of ecology issues the climate change debate raise. Our COMECE expert panel produced

a report to the bishops, which took its lead from the encyclical but drew also both a 2010 COMECE report on the environment (alarmingly still so pertinent!) and on ecological projects, small-scale and more ambitious, sponsored by the Church and her agencies from across the Union.

Continuity in COMECE's approach to the vision of European integration and to EU policy day-to-day was strengthened by the re-election of His Eminence Reinhard Cardinal Marx as president for a second term in March 2015. A new energy was provided to our reflection on policy and our monitoring of developments within the EU by successful meetings of all our commissions and working groups, by a number of new publications and by lunch-time or evening events relating directly to the topics the commissions and working groups were pursuing.

An essential part of COMECE's mission is developing and maintaining constructive relations with the EU member state bishops' conferences. This year the General Secretary visited four plenary assemblies of bishops to brief them on COMECE's work and listen to their concerns. Furthermore, we welcomed the bishops of Ireland to COMECE in November and the Secretariat team had a very fruitful exchange with our guests.

The year 2016 promises to be as unpredictable as 2015. The steady monitoring, fact-finding and net-working work of a Secretariat, permanently nestled in the heart of the Brussels bubble, is the best guarantee to the Catholic Church keeping up to speed with the rapid succession of events on the European stage. With our collective fingers on the pulse of Europe, it is true to say that we are in touch with *the joys and hopes, fears and anxieties of all those who live in our continent.*

*Father Patrick H. Daly,
General Secretary COMECE*



Father Patrick H. Daly - General Secretary COMECE

COMECE LAUNCHED ITS NEW WEBSITE IN OCTOBER

In order to make the European debate more accessible to users with an interest in the Church's engagement with the European project and EU citizens in general, the new COMECE website is now organised by topics which are featured on the Homepage. The eight topics represent the major working areas of COMECE and are related to fields of EU competence (Migration & Asylum, Health, Research & Bioethics, Ecology & Sustainability, Justice & Fundamental Rights, Intercultural Dialogue & Education, Social & Economic Policies, External Action and Religious Freedom).

On each of the eight topics are gathered all related press releases, publications and *Europeinfos* articles, as well as RSS Feeds from the European Commission.

Factsheets drafted by the members of the Secretariat are available in downloads on each topic. They compile the description of the EU competence, the Catholic Church's vision and the contribution of COMECE to the working field in question. A dedicated page is devoted to the Dialogue with the EU institutions on the basis of Article 17(3) TFEU.

The new Website is in responsive design and can be viewed on Desktop, Smartphones and Tablets.

The Annual report 2015 in its layout reflects the layout on the website. Events and activities are classified under Policy fields rather than being itemized chronologically.



MIGRATION & ASYLUM

The COMECE Secretariat works for the rights of migrants, refugees and hosting societies to be harmonised and respected in the EU for the sake of the common good in the Christian spirit of welcoming the stranger. In 2015, COMECE's activities in this domain were the following:

Dialogue with the EU

2 DECEMBER 2015

EC-CEC-COMECE Dialogue Seminar "Beyond the Refugee Crisis: Integration of Migrants into Society and Labour Market", Brussels

On 2 December, the European Commission convened a Dialogue Seminar focused on looking beyond the immediate humanitarian crisis provoked by the recent influx of migrants and refugees on European soil. COMECE, CEC, and CCME gathered experts and Church leaders from across Europe to discuss models of integration, best practices, and the fundamental values that guide integration within the European Union. All participants noted that the Churches in Europe are often the first and most important point of contact for migrants and refugees. Through welcoming Christian communities, newcomers find the support they need to begin adapting to their new environment.



Dialogue Seminar on Migration

Working Group on Migration and Asylum

The COMECE Working Group on Migration and Asylum is composed of experts appointed by the Bishops' Conferences and discusses EU policies in the migration and asylum fields, in dialogue with representatives of EU institutions. Its President is Patrick H. Daly (COMECE General Secretary) and its Secretary is José Luis Bazán

Meeting of 13 October 2015

Under the title "Migration and refugee crisis and EU response", the members of the Working Group exchanged views on national situations, and the particular challenges posed by the massive arrival of newcomers. Mr Mathias Oel (Head of Asylum Unit, DG Home Affairs, European Commission) explained the decisions and actions taken by the EU in the migration and refugee crisis, highlighting the broadly held view that this is a European issue. Dr Clemens Ladenburger (European Commission Legal Service) described the legal tools at its disposal and new instruments adopted by the EU to face the unprecedented influx of migrants and refugees coming to EU countries, and the cooperation needed from EU Member States for its implementation. These two interventions were followed by an internal debate amongst the members of the Working Group assessing the measures already commented on by the guest speakers.



Cardinal Marx & Rev. Hill



Dialogue Seminar on Migration

Events

21 OCTOBER 2015

Luncheon Debate on Climate change and human mobility: challenges and perspectives, Brussels

The lunch debate aimed at raising awareness of the potential challenges that climate induced mobility of persons represents for the international community. Prof. Kjeld Rasmussen (University of Copenhagen) described in his intervention the scientific models that suggest the dimension of future changes in temperature and rainfall in the world, emphasizing that usually climate change is not the only motivation to migrate, but there are mixed causes and factors. Ms Jo de Backer, from the Information service of IOM-Brussels, highlighted that in the migration debate, human beings are at the centre, and that migration should be seen mostly as a positive and effective adaptation strategy in case of situations forcing people to leave their homelands. The exhibition "Moving Stories", displayed in the conference room, presenting individual testimonies on the impact of climate change worldwide, was an additional feature of the event.

1 DECEMBER 2015

Evening debate: "Integration of Migrants: a Catholic perspective", Brussels

The Catholic Church – together with other actors – plays an important role in welcoming migrants and in providing initial care for them and their families. With her long pastoral experience behind her, the Church realises we must look beyond the immediate horizon of a humanitarian crisis and consider how best to integrate migrants into the host societies. The evening debate brought together Mr Martin Wilde (BKU - Bund Katholischer Unternehmer), Fr Arun Alphonse, OFM, from St. Anthony's Parish of Kraainem, Mr Sergio Barciela (Migration and Inclusion Cáritas Española) and Fr Damian Cichy, SVD (Cardinal S. Wyszyński University in Warsaw and Fu Shenfu Migrant Centre). The panellists helped to deepen our understanding of the complex challenges involved in integrating migrants into our host societies. Parishes are at the front-line of the integration challenge: their experience can enlighten all – politicians, civil servants, social workers, town planners, civic authorities – working on integrating migrants.



Migrants debate - Martin Wilde



Fr Arun Alphonse OFM

Publications

23 JANUARY 2015

Comments on the EC proposal for amendments to the Dublin III regulation regarding unaccompanied minors by Caritas Europa, CCME, COMECE Secretariat, Eurodiaconia, ICMC, JRS-Europe and QCEA

9 SEPTEMBER 2015

The refugee crisis requires a common European solution - Statement of the Standing Committee of COMECE on the current refugee crisis and the debate on a common European migration and asylum policy

2 OCTOBER 2015

Joint Statement of Bishop Christopher Hill, President of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), and Cardinal Reinhard Marx, President of the Commission of the Episcopates of the European Community (COMECE) on the current migrant crisis

2 DECEMBER 2015

"I was a stranger and you made me welcome..." - A reflection by the Commission of Episcopal Conferences of the EU (COMECE) on the question of Refugees, Migrants and Integration

WEDNESDAY 21 October 2015
Lunch debate from 12: 00 to 14:30 pm



**CLIMATE CHANGE
AND HUMAN MOBILITY**
CHALLENGES
AND PERSPECTIVES

Ms Jo De Backer
International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Prof. Kjeld Rasmussen
University of Copenhagen

Moderation:
Fr Patrick H. Daly
General Secretary, COMECE

COMECE
Square de Meeus 19
1050 Brussels



Please register by 20 October on: www.comece.eu

poster Climate Migration



HEALTH, RESEARCH & BIOETHICS

COMECE chiefly covers the bioethical issues that arise at the EU level in the ambits of health and of research, although the main competences with regard to these matters remain largely at the Member States' level. In 2015, COMECE's activities in this domain were the following:

Events

23 FEBRUARY 2015

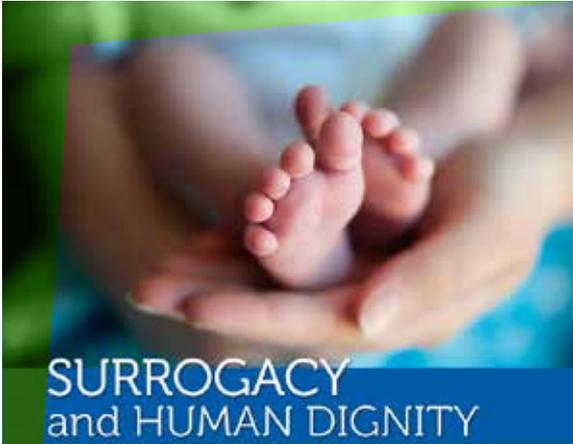
Seminar on Surrogacy and Human Dignity at the European Parliament, Brussels

The seminar was organised together with the Working Group on Bioethics and Human Dignity of the EPP Group in the European Parliament. On this occasion, the Opinion of the COMECE Working Group on Ethics in Research and Medicine was presented and the interlinks between surrogacy and trafficking in human beings was also specifically addressed in a dedicated presentation.

Publications

23 FEBRUARY 2015

"Opinion on Gestational Surrogacy: the question of European and International Rules" - Gestational surrogacy is an issue of increasing preoccupation and concern in contemporary political and legal debate across the European Union. Against that background, the COMECE Working Group on Ethics in Research and Medicine has published an Opinion making suggestions with related to the issue of the transcription of birth certificates of children born abroad through surrogacy.



**SURROGACY
and HUMAN DIGNITY**

Hosted by **Miroslav Mikolášik** MEP,
Chairman of the EPP WG on Bioethics and Human Dignity

Guest speakers:
Patrick Verspielen SJ, Centre Sevrès
Presentation of COMECE's Opinion on Surrogacy
Laetitia Pouliquen, Europe for Family
with the participation of
Fr. **Patrick Daly** and **J. Ramos-Ascensão**, COMECE

Monday 23 February 2015 from 16:30 to 18:00 hrs
Room JAN 6Q1, European Parliament, Brussels

 Working Group on
Bioethics and
Human Dignity  EPP Group  COMECE

Poster Surrogacy and Human Dignity

Working Group on Ethics in Research and Medicine

The Working Group on Ethics in Research and Medicine monitors and prepares opinions, reports and contributions to the EU debate and on EU-policy in the areas of research, innovation and healthcare. It also follows the work of the European Group on Ethics (EGE).

Its President is Fr. Patrick H. Daly (COMECE General Secretary) and its Secretary is José Ramos-Ascensão (Legal adviser at the COMECE secretariat). The members of this Working group are experts in the field of ethics, law and science nominated by the EU Bishops' Conferences.

Meeting of 23 February

The first part of the meeting was devoted to the analysis and discussion of the Work Programme of the European Commission for 2015 as well as the priorities of the Latvian Presidency in this field. The second part of the meeting took place at the European Parliament where, in a joint event of COMECE and the Working Group on Bioethics and Human Dignity of the European Popular Party (EPP), the Opinion of the COMECE's WG on 'surrogate motherhood' was presented. The Opinion assesses the ethics of the practice of surrogacy, discussing its tangled legal repercussions and advocating European or, ideally, international rules determining, at least, the refusal of the recognition of foreign birth certificates concerning children born through a 'surrogate mother' whenever a compensation has taken place (the case of 'commercial surrogacy').

Meeting of 12 October

The Working Group analysed, as central theme, 'palliative care', a topic also addressed earlier in 2014 in a Workshop held at the Pontifical Academy for Life. The guest speakers who intervened in the meeting were: Antoni Montserrat, DG SANTE of the European Commission,, Andreas Kruse, from the University of Heidelberg, Germany, Chris Gastmans, from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, MEP Alojz Peterle, Carlo Galasso, Director of 'Hospitality Europe', and Julio Gomez, head of Palliative Care at St. John of God hospital in Santurce, Spain. An Opinion will be drafted on this subject, focusing on the definition and components of palliative care (including boundaries with other end-of-life issues, such as euthanasia), clinical situations and the adequate time for its introduction, the meaning of human suffering, proportionality and treatment limits, palliative sedation, inequalities in access to quality care and the role of the family.



Surrogacy-DIFD-UK - © FlickrR

ECOLOGY & SUSTAINABILITY

Since 2008 COMECE has been engaged with the topic of climate change and regularly stressed the necessity of an ecological conversion and a different and more sober style of life. In 2015, COMECE's activities in this domain were the following:



Plenary

28-30 OCTOBER 2015

Contribution to UN Climate Change Conference 2015 (COP21), Paris

The autumn Plenary Assembly of the 27 Member Bishops of COMECE was exceptionally held in Paris in the premises of the French Bishops' Conference (Avenue de Breteuil) from Wednesday 28 to Friday 30 October. By meeting in Paris, ahead of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21), the COMECE Bishops wished to send a strong message and to communicate their concerns about Climate Change.



Ad hoc Working Group on Climate Change and Sustainability

In order to prepare a contribution for the climate negotiations at COP 21 in Paris in December 2015, the COMECE Secretariat set up a small project-based ad-hoc expert group in the spring 2015.

The members of this group were Prof. Celia Deane-Drummond (Notre-Dame University, USA), Dr. Cecilia Dal Oglio (FOCSIV, Italy), Fr. Sean McDonagh (Dalgan Park, Ireland), Prof. Wolfgang Lutz (University of Economics Vienna, Austria) Prof. Ortwin Renn (University of Stuttgart, Germany), Dr. Patrick H. Daly, GS COMECE. The working group was coordinated by Drs. Michael Kuhn, Deputy, GS COMECE and Ruth Aigner..

Meeting of 11 May 2015

The experts met in Brussels (partly via Skype) and were invited to send short contributions, on the basis of which the text of the report was drafted.

The final draft was presented and approved by the COMECE Plenary Assembly in October in Paris, before being published mid-November under the title. "The time of repentance has come". The report was directed to the negotiators at COP 21 but also to concerned EU citizens and to all who care about the future of our planet a comprehensive report on the climate issue.

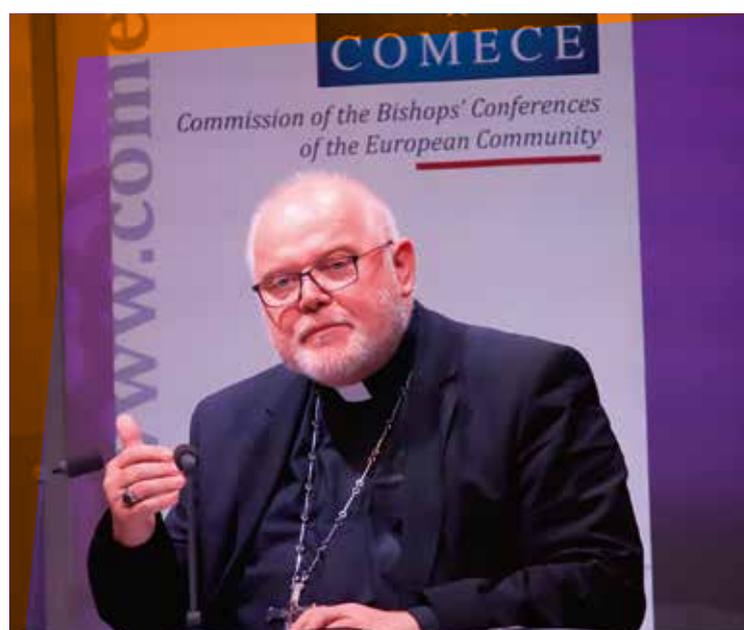
Inspired by the broad ecological vision of Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Laudato si'*, the report follows an analysis of the current climate dynamic with a series of concrete policy suggestions, the basic thrust of which is a move toward ecological conversion. The report also contains an annexe which details examples of Church-based or faith-inspired practical ecological projects from across Europe. These initiatives, small-scale and modest for the most part, are nonetheless inspiring. They prove that ecological conversion is possible..

Events

26 OCTOBER 2015

Appeal to COP 21 negotiating parties

issued by Cardinals, Patriarchs and Bishops from across the globe representing the continental groupings of national episcopal conferences, co-signed by Cardinal Marx



Cardinal Marx

29 OCTOBER 2015

Evening debate with Cardinal Marx and Connie Hedegaard, les Bernardins, Paris

On the occasion of the COMECE Plenary in Paris, the Conference Centre "Les Bernardins" invited Connie Hedegaard (Denmark), former European Commissioner and President of the Kann Foundation, and Cardinal Reinhard Marx, President of COMECE, to discuss the institutional and educational challenges of ecological conversion. The former EU Commissioner called for "the citizen's commitment not just come to a sudden halt after COP 21 has come to a close in December: it must go on". Cardinal Marx insisted that "the agreement must not be empty promises". He emphasized that the Church and Christians must be creative in developing alternative lifestyles, which can inspire the whole of society. "Parishes and Christian communities must become not only biotopes of faith, but also biotopes of a new lifestyle".

25 JUNE 2015

Luncheon Debate on Initial reactions to the Encyclical « Laudato Si », Brussels

What is the impact of the Encyclical « Laudato Si » on the European Union ? How do EU Politicians interpret the key messages conveyed by Pope Francis his encyclical letter ? To find out, COMECE organised a Luncheon Debate in Brussels on 25 June, confronting a theologian with a member of the European Parliament. Father Sean McDonagh Irish Eco-theologian, missionary priest, best-selling author on Climate change issues, presented extensively the structure and scope of the Encyclical which was published last 18 June. MEP Philippe Lamberts said he was enthusiastic about the Encyclical. 'It's a revolutionary message'. The MEP who is Co-chair of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament said he found himself in the encyclical. Both agreed that the revolutionary aspect of the message was that technology alone will not solve the issue and that we need a conversion and to move away from a consumerist culture.



Publications

26 NOVEMBER 2015

"The time for conversion is now..." - Report to the Bishops of COMECE on climate protection



Connie Hedegaard

COMECE

INVITATION

JUNE 25
12:00 - 14:00

Luncheon Debate
Initial reactions to the Encyclical « Laudato Si »

On the occasion of the publication of the Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis on Ecology (18 June 2015), COMECE warmly invites you to a Luncheon Debate

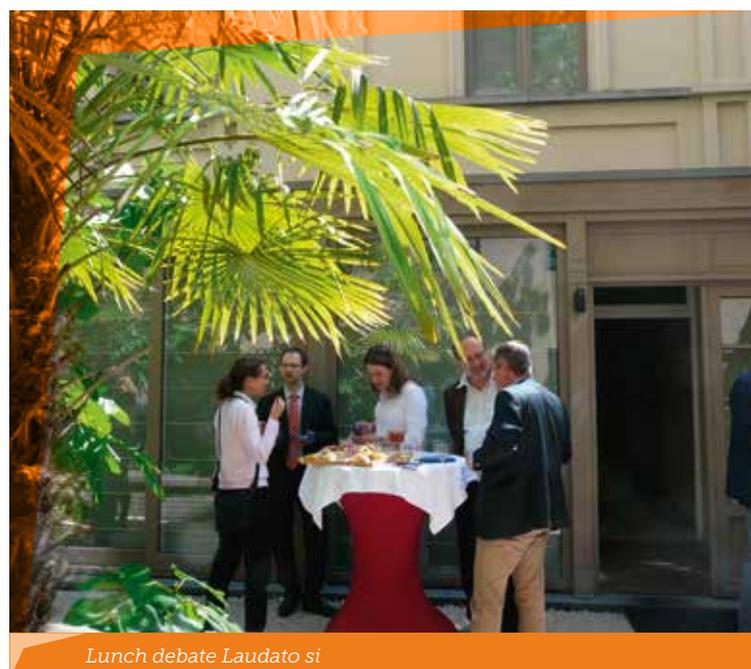
with

Father Sean McDonagh
Irish Eco-theologian, missionary priest, best-selling author on Climate change issues

and

Philippe Lamberts MEP
Belgian Parliamentarian, Co-chair of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament

Lunch debate laudato si poster



Lunch debate Laudato si

JUSTICE & FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

COMECE is of the view that fundamental rights must have a clear and objective concept of human dignity as their basis, that the focus must be on the ethical implications of EU policies and legislation, and that considerations must be given to the way these latter may impact on the activities of the Church. In 2015, COMECE's activities in this domain were the following:

Dialogue with the EU

1 OCTOBER 2015

Participation in the First Annual Colloquium on Fundamental rights organised by European Commission, Brussels

A first Annual Colloquium on Fundamental rights organised by the European Commission was held in Brussels this 1st October. The Colloquium looked at trends and underlying reasons for antisemitic and anti-Muslim incidents in the EU. Mgr Hoogenboom, Bishop of Utrecht and Member of COMECE stated that "the Catholic Church condemns (and encourages to condemn) all instances of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hatred without any hesitation or ambiguity. The Church stands ready to voice its unequivocal support for the affected religious communities and understands their sense of grievance." He recalled that Interreligious dialogue is important for social peace, not only for peace between religions and religious communities. The Catholic Church plays a relevant and important role in the whole structure of social harmony and she is ready to contribute in the context of dialogue on the basis of Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU..



Frans Timmermans

Legal Affairs Commission

The Commission on Legal Affairs monitors and prepares statements and contributions to the legal work of the EU, especially in those areas with a direct impact on the work/functioning of the Catholic Church in the EU and topics of importance for the State–Church relationship in the Member States. Its President is Bishop Theodorus C.M. Hoogenboom (Auxiliary Bishop of Utrecht, The Netherlands) and its Secretary is Alessandro Calcagno.

Meeting of 22 September 2015

The COMECE Legal Affairs Commission reconvened in its new composition. Discussions focused, with the participation of external experts (including institutional ones) on two main topics, also in view of drafting of written legal opinions: the possible extension of the concept of 'reasonable accommodation' to cover its application on grounds of religion; and developments in cross-border EU family law.

Members were also updated on the state of play on the data protection reform and exchanged views on future topics of discussion. Exchanges were devoted to national legal developments.

Events

25-26 SEPTEMBER 2015

Conference on the Role of the Catholic Church in the process of European integration, Krakow

"Dignity – Freedom – Human rights", absolute values or product of culture expressed by political will in laws, as well as in courts' decisions? Are they always soundly interpreted or linked with desirable developments at the EU level? An event in Cracow (Poland) organised in partnership with COMECE tackled this topic also with reference to life-protection issues, family concerns and the refugee crisis. The focus of debates and interventions was placed on key elements such as: protection of life from conception until natural death, marriage and family, migration and asylum, the concept of human dignity from a Christian perspective, freedom of religion, Christian-Muslim relations in Europe and in the Middle-East. The dramatic situation in Ukraine was also addressed with interventions that highlighted the need for the EU to play a decisive role.

Contributions to consultations

29 MAY 2015

Contribution to the consultation on "Tolerance and respect: preventing and combating anti- Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe"

30 September 2015

Contribution to the consultation on "Directive 2010/13/EU on audiovisual media services (AVMSD) - A media framework for the 21st century"



INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE & EDUCATION

In dialogue with the EU, COMECE offers the experience of the Church who runs a wide range of institutions of formal and non-formal education. COMECE also underlines the importance of «intercultural competence», of tolerance, openness and of mutual respect in a context of different cultures and traditions. In 2015, COMECE's activities in this domain were the following:

Event

28 JUNE - 11 JULY 2015

International Summer School in Graz-Seckau

Promoting dialogue on the "European Project" and its objectives has always been a part of COMECE's mission. Since 2005, with the Diocese of Graz-Seckau and the University of Graz, COMECE found two partners with whom a two-week academic summer university for around 80 students was launched in Seggau. Lectures and seminars deal with EU law, economics, history, politics and European society, as well as art, media, philosophy and religion.

The 2015 Summer University was the tenth event in this cooperation between the Church and the University. The Church and faith have a presence at the Summer University through the Bishop and COMECE, as well as through certain accents in the scientific/academic programme and a daily spiritual programme. At the same time, the Summer University does not consciously direct itself solely towards Catholics: from the outset it has seen itself as a "facilitator of dialogue" jointly supported by the Church, as a place of encounter, exchange and discussion about Europe.

The summer school is a service provided by the Church in our plural and secular society, entirely in the spirit of Pope Francis, in support of the European integration project and its global dimension, and a service to all future supporters of this project. Within the meaning of this "transcending service", it is only logical that the topic chosen for 2016 should be "Transgression".

SOCIAL & ECONOMIC POLICIES

The COMECE Secretariat follows socio-ethical questions raised by the process of European integration in the field of social and economic policy. In 2015, COMECE's activities in this domain were the following:

Events

17 MARCH 2015

Conference on Decent work - the path to dignity for all at the European Parliament, Brussels

The eradication of poverty and fighting inequality, together with sustainable development, are among the most debated issues in international politics, within civil society as well as within the Churches. The European Union is among the major players in these discussions. On 17 March 2015, the Secretariat of COMECE together with Catholic-Inspired Organisations and under the kind patronage of the two Members of the European Parliament, Ms Patrizia Toia (S&D) and Mr Davor Ivo Stier (EPP) organised a Debate on Decent Work. The conference event highlighted opportunities for decent work as a way out of poverty, social dialogue as a road to social peace, both connected to achieving sustainable, peaceful and prosperous societies.

3 MARCH 2015

European Sunday Alliance - Launch of the European Parliament's Work life balance Interest Group, Brussels

COMECE, who is a supporter of the European Sunday Alliance, took part in the launch of the first European Interest Group on WORK-LIFE BALANCE at the EU Parliament and in the presence of MEPs from different political groups. For the first time, the interest group - supported by representatives of politicians, trade unions, business executives, family and sports organisations and representatives of churches and religious communities - brought together 50 people to discuss how to ensure that EU legislation respects and promotes workers' health and promotes a better balance between family and private life and work. Participants shared the consensus, that these objectives do not conflict with the objective of economic competitiveness, in the contrary. Competitiveness needs innovation, innovation needs creativity and creativity needs recreation.

1 JUNE 2015

European Sunday Alliance - European Parliament's Work life balance Interest Group meeting on Acceleration Society, Brussels

The European Sunday Alliance hosted its 2nd meeting of the Interest Group "Work-Life-Balance". The German and the Austrian Sunday Alliances, both members of the European Sunday Alliance, under the kind patronage of the Members of the European Parliament Ms. Evelyn Regner and Mr. Thomas Mann, invited Prof. Dr. Hartmut Rosa to give his insights and reflections on the process of acceleration in modern society and its consequences for the work-life-balance in our societies. Around 40 people, members of the European Parliament and representatives of civil society organizations, gathered to discuss the importance of "oases of deceleration".

10 DECEMBER 2015

European Sunday Alliance - European Parliament's Work life balance Interest Group meeting on Healthy work places in Europe, keys to preventing psychosocial risks, Brussels

Tackling the rise in psychosocial diseases by ensuring a fair work-life balance, proper rest and a common work-free day must be a key element of the EU Strategic Framework on health and safety. That was the theme for the third meeting of the Interest Group on Work-Life balance that took place under the patronage of Ms Evelyn Regner MEP (S&D) and Mr Thomas Mann MEP (EPP). Participants discussed how the Strategic Framework can support research about the relation of psychosocial risks and balancing work, family, and social life. They also were interested in the right to "switch-off", the emergence of new risks, gender imbalances in unpaid work and care responsibilities, and how to improve the implementation of existing health and safety legislation. The well-attended event included representation from religious organisations, trade unions, national Sunday Alliances, civil society, and the European Parliament.



MEP Evelyn Regner and MEP Thomas Mann

Social Affairs Commission

The Commission on Social Affairs monitors and prepares statements, contributions and activities related to EU social policy and public debate on the wider EU social issues: labour and employment, youth policy, education and training, working conditions, freedom of movement of people, capital, goods and services. Its President is Bishop Gianni Ambrosio (COMECE Vice-President, Bishop of Piacenza-Bobbio, Italy) and its interim Secretary for 2015 was Monique Baujard. Its Members are experts on social policy nominated by the EU Bishops' Conferences.

Meeting of 23 September 2015

Youth unemployment was the main topic of this meeting, with an intervention by Prof. Stefan Sorin Muresan (Wurzburg University) on the social market economy and the employment situation in Germany. Ulrike Storst, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission then reported on the action taken by the EU in favor of youth employment. There was also a presentation on schemes facilitating integration of youth in to the labour market by Angel Gudian Canicoba of Don Bosco International.

An exchange of views among the participants was then used to measure the diversity of situations of youth unemployment in the countries represented, but also common concerns.



© EP Martin Lahousse

EXTERNAL ACTION

COMECE together with Justice and Peace Europe aims to assist the EU in its vocation to promote global peace and assume its responsibility for supporting sustainable development and social justice across the world. In 2015, COMECE's activities in this domain were the following:

Events

12-13 JUNE 2015

The socio-ethical seminar on the Consolidation and new challenges in Eastern Europe 25 years after the German reunification, was the fifth in a series co-organised with the Katholische Sozialwissenschaftlichen Zentralstelle (KSZ), Mönchengladbach

This year's Mönchengladbach seminar took place, for the fifth time, in cooperation with COMECE. About 100 theologians and social scientists, church and society activists and interested citizens gathered in the town hall of Mönchengladbach. The conference was dedicated to the "Consolidation and new challenges. Eastern Europe 25 years after the fall of the Iron curtain". The Conference try to assess the recent process of transformation towards democracy, the rule of law and market economy. The Conference also focused on Ukraine, the armed conflicts in the East of the country and the Russian annexation of Crimea.



Federica Mogherini at NATO

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 the External Action of the EU. This Commission is at the same time an ad-hoc working group of Justice and Peace Europe. Its President is Archbishop Jean-Claude Hollerich (Archbishop of Luxembourg and President of Justice & Peace Europe) and its Secretary is Stefan Lunte (General Secretary of Justice & Peace Europe and Adviser at the COMECE secretariat) assisted by Marek Misak.

Meeting of 26-27 January 2015

The first meeting allowed for a series of exchanges with policy makers from the European institutions to identify priorities in a wide range of policy areas. Ms Nicole Reckinger (Unit Human Rights and Multilateral Diplomacy, European External Action Service) updated the members on the EU instruments concerning the promotion of human rights, including religious freedom, worldwide. Mr Remco Vahl (DG Trade, European Commission) presented the opportunities and challenges of Economic Partnership Agreements. With General Patrick de Rousiers (Chairman of the EU Military Committee) the members discussed developments within the Common Security and Defence Policy. Mr Michael Köhler (DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission) highlighted the main challenges for the European Neighbourhood Policy in the light of its review, and finally, MEP Davor Ivo Stier presented the European Parliament's perspective on the post-2015 Development agenda. After an exchange of views, the meeting concluded with the adoption of a work programme containing initiatives in each of the above mentioned areas.



Luncheon debate on Lethal weapons: Dr Bernhard Koch

19 NOVEMBER 2015

Luncheon Debate on the Dangers of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems, Brussels

Autonomous lethal weapon systems represent one of the greatest challenges to the peaceful co-existence of peoples. They are not just highly problematic from the viewpoint of international law. They may also have a destabilising impact on security policy. However, above all their use raises major ethical questions. During the lunch debate, two distinguished experts, Dr. Bernhard Koch (Institute for Theology and Peace, Hamburg) and Dr. Niklas Schörnig (Peace Research Institute Frankfurt) discussed the risks of lethal autonomous weapon systems and presented a Memorandum was launched on this occasion.

Contribution to consultation

24 JUNE 2015

"Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy"
- A contribution by the Secretariats of COMECE and Justice and Peace Europe to the public consultation



Thursday, 19 November 2015
from 12:30 to 14:30

The Dangers of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems

LUNCHEON DEBATE

Speakers:
Dr. Bernhard Koch
Institute for Theology and Peace, Hamburg
Dr. Niklas Schörnig
Peace Research Institute, Frankfurt

Please register by 18 November 2015
at: <http://www.comece.eu/lethal-weapons>

COMECE
Square de Meeus 19, Brussels

JUSTITIA ET PAX
COMECE

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

COMECE embraces the vision that the fundamental and inalienable right to religious freedom is the cornerstone of all human rights. It supports the view that EU decision-makers and officers should pay special attention to this fundamental right, in particular in its external relations. In 2015, COMECE's activities in this domain were the following:

Dialogue with the EU

24 MARCH 2015

COMECE participated in the high-level conference on "The rise of religious radicalism and fundamentalism and the role of inter-religious dialogue in the promotion of tolerance and respect for human dignity" held at the European Parliament, Brussels

The conference was organised by Antonio Tajani Vice-President of the European Parliament. COMECE was represented, as speakers, by Father Patrick Daly and Mgr Theodorus C.M. Hoogenboom, Auxiliary Bishop of Utrecht.

16 JUNE 2015

High-Level Religious Leaders Meeting "Living together and disagreeing well", took place at the Berlyamont, Brussels,

After the attacks in Paris and Copenhagen earlier in the year, the EU Commission wanted to devote its dialogue with the Religious



High level conference at the European Parliament

Leaders to the enormous challenges being currently faced by European society. On the occasion of this eleventh High-Level Religious Leaders' Meeting with the EU institutions, the President of COMECE, His Eminence Cardinal Reinhard Marx, stated that at the heart of the social cohesion issue lay the matter of social justice: 'Lurking behind social alienation and exclusion, we can detect among many people fear that the modern world represents a threat to them.' The president of the Catholic lay movement Focolare, Maria Voce, who also participated at the meeting, expressed the view that 'Dialogue is not just an activity, it is an attitude to life.' The hosts of the meeting, held in the Berlaymont HQ of the EU Commission in Brussels, were the Commission First Vice-President Frans Timmermans and the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani.

1 DECEMBER 2015

COMECE participated in the High-level conference on the persecution of Christians in the world organised by the European Parliament, Brussels

This high-level conference was organised by Antonio Tajani, vice-president of Parliament, and attended by President Martin Schulz. During his intervention, the Vice-President of COMECE, Mgr.

Jean Kockerols, Auxiliary Bishop of Malines-Bruxelles, stated "International peace programmes must include Christians, so that in those areas torn apart by war and internal conflict, Christians may be able to play their part – with their rights and entitlements duly protected – in creating a secure, safe, stable society."

Events

20 JANUARY 2015

Ecumenical Conference "The conversion of Christians to Ecumenism" organised by the Chapel of the Resurrection, Brussels

23 OCTOBER 2015

Breakfast on Christian Refugees in Northern Iraq: Current challenges and prospects (with Aid to the Church in Need), Brussels

Contribution to consultation

29 MAY 2015

Contribution to the consultation on "Tolerance and respect: preventing and combating anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe"



Mgr Bashar Warda, Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of Erbil (Iraqi Kurdistan)

DIALOGUE WITH THE EU RELATED EVENTS

The dialogue between the European Union and the Churches has developed in an informal way over the past years on the initiative of EU officials and Church organisations based in Brussels, but without enjoying a legal basis. The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty has created legally binding grounds for the first time in the history of the EU, for the dialogue between the EU and the Churches and religious associations or communities.

15 January 2015 | Meeting with the Latvian Presidency of the Council | Riga

24 March 2015 | Participation in the High-level conference on the role of interreligious dialogue for the promotion of tolerance and respect for human dignity in the wake of religious radicalism and fundamentalism by the European Parliament | Brussels

16 June 2015 | High-Level Religious Leaders Meeting "Living together and disagreeing well" | Brussels

22 June 2015 | Meeting with the Luxemburg Presidency of the Council | Luxemburg | Dialogue with the EU

DIALOGUE WITH THE EU RELATED EVENTS



1 October 2015 | Participation in the First Annual Colloquium on Fundamental rights organised by European Commission | Brussels

1 December 2015 | Participation in the High-level conference on the persecution of Christians in the world organised by the European Parliament | Brussels

2 December 2015 | EC-CEC-COMECE Dialogue Seminar "Beyond the Refugee Crisis: Integration of Migrants into Society and Labour Market" | Brussels

MISSA PRO EUROPA

*Celebrated at the start of the working year of the European institutions
Célébrée à l'occasion de la rentrée des institutions européennes*



Wednesday September 23rd 2015 at 19.00
Mercredi 23 septembre 2015 à 19h00

Notre Dame au Sablon
Place du grand Sablon
1000 Bruxelles

H.E. Mgr. Jean-Claude Hollerich
Archbishop of Luxembourg

H.E. Mgr Jean Kockerols
*Auxiliary Bishop of Malines-Brussels,
Vice-President of COMECE*

 massforeurope@comece.eu

Editeur responsable: Jean Kockerols, Rue de la Loi 14, 1000 Bruxelles



© Group photo Juncker

Visit of the COMECE Bishops to Mr Juncker, the President of the EU Commission

MASS FOR EUROPE

The Mass for Europe is organised by COMECE in partnership with the Diocese of Malines-Brussels and the member Bishop of COMECE of the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU, on the occasion of the resumption of work by the European institutions each year in September.

23 SEPTEMBER 2015

Archbishop Jean-Claude Hollerich, member Bishop of COMECE and Archbishop of Luxembourg, the Member State currently holding the presidency of the Council of the EU, was invited to deliver the homily during the Mass for Europe, celebrated in Brussels on 23 September. At the very moment when an extraordinary European Council was being held in Brussels on the refugee crisis, Archbishop Hollerich urged Christians to show openness and hospitality: "When so many refugees knock on the doors of our countries, how could we dare not to meet this challenge. He reminded Christians of their duty to provide for refugees, regardless of their religious allegiance: "We would be a strange kind of Christians if we would only reach out to those who share our faith. The Christian identity of Europe is definitely in danger if we do not follow the values of the Gospel". The collection was made for the Josefa Foundation, whose mission is to welcome, accommodate and accompany persons made vulnerable by migration.



Mgr Hollerich

PLENARIES

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

- Spring Plenary Assembly, 18-20 March 2015 | The Priorities of the new European Commission | Brussels
- Autumn Plenary Assembly, 28-30 October 2015 | Contribution to UN Climate Change Conference 2015 (COP21) | Paris

STANDING COMMITTEE

The Standing Committee of COMECE consists of the President, Cardinal Reinhard Marx, and two Vice-Presidents: Mgr Jean Kockerols (Auxiliary Bishop of Brussels-Malines, Belgium) and Mgr Gianni Ambrosio (Bishop of Piacenza-Bobbio, Italy). The Standing Committee met on five occasions in 2015:

- 12 January 2015 | Brussels
- 18 March 2015 | Brussels
- 27-28 May 2015 | Rome
- 9 September 2015 | Munich
- 28 October 2015 | Paris

MEETINGS WITH NATIONAL BISHOPS' CONFERENCES

- 10 February 2015 | Meeting with the Dutch Bishops' Conference | Utrecht
- 4 March 2015 | Meeting with the Nordic Bishops' Conference | Essen
- 3 – 7 November 2015| Meeting with French Bishops' Conference | Lourdes
- 10 November 2015 | Visit from a delegation from the Irish Bishops' Conference Brussels
- 12 November| Meeting with the Greek Bishops' Conference |Athens

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY
07/01/2015 Sternsinger (Germany)	2-4/02/2015 Group of Catholic Interns of the Westminster Parliament (UK)	2/03/2015 Group of Seminarians (Hungary)	16/04/2015 Group of Salesian students (Italy)	05/05/2015 Group of EPP Interns (EU)
07/01/2015 Delegation from the Confederazione Nazionale delle Misericordie d' Italia (Italy)	5/02/2015 Group of Seminarians of the St Martin Community (France)	24/03/2015 Group of visitors Institute of Higher studies for Women of the Pontifical Atheneum Regina Apostolorum (Italy)	20/04/2015 Group of students from Sartrouville (France)	06/05/2015 Delegation of the German Bishops' Conference Subcommittee on Bioethics (Germany)
	5/02/2015 Group of Seminarians of the St Martin Community (France)	26/03/2015 Group of EPP Interns (EU)		7-8/05/2015 Group from the Parish Notre-Dame de Versailles (France)
		26/03/2015 Group of French Parliamentary Assistants (Assemblée Nationale et Sénat) (France)		22/05/2015 Group of Interns from EKD and Eurodiaconia (Germany)
		28/03/2015 Group of young people from the Archdiocese of Salzburg and the Diocese of Graz-Seckau (Austria)		26/05/2015 Group of students in journalism IPF Munich (Germany)
				28/05/2015 Group of EPP Interns (EU)

JUNE	JULY	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER
3/06/2015 Group of students from Paris Dauphine (France)	16/07/2015 Group of Caritas from the Diocese of Hildsheim (Germany)	13/10/2015 Visit of Metropolitan Porfirije of Zagreb-Ijubjana - the Serbian Orthodox Church from Croatia to the Brussels Institutions (Serbia)	3/11/2015 Group of Caritas from the Diocese of Hildsheim (Germany)
5/06/2015 Group of Catholic Workers' Movement from Borken (Germany)		14/10/2015 Group of students from the University of Nijmegen (The Netherlands)	10/11/2015 Delegation from the Irish Bishops' Conference (Ireland)
22/06/2015 Group of Caritas from the Diocese of Regensburg (Germany)		15/10/2015 Group for the Katholishes Bildungswerk (Austria)	10-12/11/2015 Group of journalists GKP (Gesellschaft Katholischer Publizisten) (Germany)
25/06/2015 Group of Students from the Sophie Barat Gymnasium Hamburg (Germany)		23/10/2015 Group of Churches of Finland	11/11/2015 Delegation from the International Union of Muslim Scholars (France)
			17-18/11/2015 KOLPINGWERK Europäischer Vorstand (Germany)

OUR COMECE MEMBER BISHOPS

COMECE is made up of Bishops delegated by the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of the 28 Member States of the European Union. A single Bishop represents Denmark, Sweden, and Finland; while the Bishops' Conference of the United Kingdom is represented by a Bishop of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, and by a Bishop of the Scottish Bishops' Conference.

H.Em. Reinhard Card. Marx



Archbishop of Munich & Freising
(Germany), President

H.E. Mgr Jean Kockerols



Auxiliary Bishop of Malines-Bruxelles
(Belgium), first Vice-president

H.E. Mgr Gianni Ambrosio



Bishop of Piacenza-Bobbio
(Italy), Vice-president

H.E. Mgr Virgil Bercea



Bishop of Oradea Mare
(Romania)

H.Em. Josip Card. Bozanić



Archbishop of Zagreb
(Croatia)

H.E. Mgr Ferenc Cserhádi



Auxiliary Bishop of Esztergom-Budapest
(Hungary)

H.E. Mgr Antonio A. dos Santos Marto



Bishop of Leiria-Fátima
(Portugal)

H.E. Mgr Hugh Gilbert



Bishop of Aberdeen
(Scotland)

H.E. Mgr Jean-Pierre Grallet



Archbishop of Strasbourg
(France)

H.E. Mgr Adolfo González Montes



Bishop of Almería
(Spain)

H.E. Mgr Jozef Hal'ko



Auxiliary Bishop of Bratislava
(Slovakia)

H.E. Mgr Jean-Claude Hollerich



Archbishop of Luxembourg
(Luxemburg)

H.E. Mgr Theodorus C.M. Hoogenboom



Auxiliary Bishop of Utrecht
(The Netherlands)

H.E. Mgr Philippe Jean-Charles Jourdan



Apostolic Administrator
of Estonia

H.E. Mgr William Kenney



Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham
(England & Wales)

H.E. Mgr Czesław Kozon



Bishop of Copenhagen
(Nordic)

H.E. Mgr Rimantas Norvila



Bishop of Vilkaiviškis
(Lithuania)

H.E. Mgr Christo Proykov



Bishop of Sofia
(Bulgaria)

H.E. Mgr Sevastianos Rossolatos



Archbishop of Athens
(Greece)

H.E. Mgr Charles Jude Scicluna



Archbishop of Malta
(Malta)

H.E. Mgr Youssef Soueif



Archbishop of the Maronites
(Cyprus)

H.E. Mgr Janusz Bogusław Stepnowski



Bishop of Łomża
(Poland)

H.E. Mgr Zbignev Stankevics,



Archbishop of Riga
(Latvia)

H.E. Mgr Franc Šuštar



Auxiliary Bishop of Ljubljana
(Slovenia)

H.E. Mgr Noël Treanor



Bishop of Down & Connor
(Ireland)

H.E. Mgr Jan Vokál



Bishop of Hradec Králové
(Czech Republic)

H.E. Mgr Āgidius Johann Zsifkovic



Bishop of Eisenstadt
(Austria)

Bishops observers

H.E. Mgr Stanislav Hočevar,



Archbishop of Belgrade
(Serbia)

H.E. Mgr Markus Büchel



Bishop of St Gallen
(Switzerland)



COMECE Bishops on the occasion of their plenary in Paris

OUR COMECE STAFF

The Secretariat ensures the continuity of 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 Patrick H. Daly
General Secretary

Michael Kuhn
Assistant General Secretary [Seconded by the Austrian Bishops' Conference]
Advisor for Ecology & Sustainability and Education, Culture and Youth policy

Alessandro Calcagno
[Seconded by the Italian Bishops' Conference]
Legal advisor for Fundamental Rights and Article 17 TFEU issues
Secretary of the COMECE Commission on Legal Affairs

José-Luis Bazán
Legal advisor for Migration, Asylum and Religious Freedom
Secretary of the COMECE Working Group on Migration and Asylum

José Ramos-Ascensão
Legal advisor for Health, Research and Bioethics
Secretary of the COMECE Working Group on Ethics in Research and Medicine

Stefan Lunte
Advisor for External Affairs
General Secretary of Justice & Peace Europe
Secretary of the COMECE Commission on the External Relations of the European Union

Anna Echterhoff
Legal advisor for Institutional and Social Affairs
(until end of March 2015)

Marek Misak
Advisor for External Relations; Justice and Peace Europe

Johanna Touzel
Spokesperson & Press officer

Aimery de Vérac
Administration & Finances (until end of March 2015)

Irmina Nockiewicz
Secretary

Maud Oger
Assistant to the General Secretary

Albert Arevalo
Support staff

Cynthia Quijano Aquino
Support staff

The COMECE Bishops and the Secretariat wish to thank the former Secretariat members, Anna Echterhoff and Aimery de Vérac, for the work they have accomplished within the Secretariat.

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

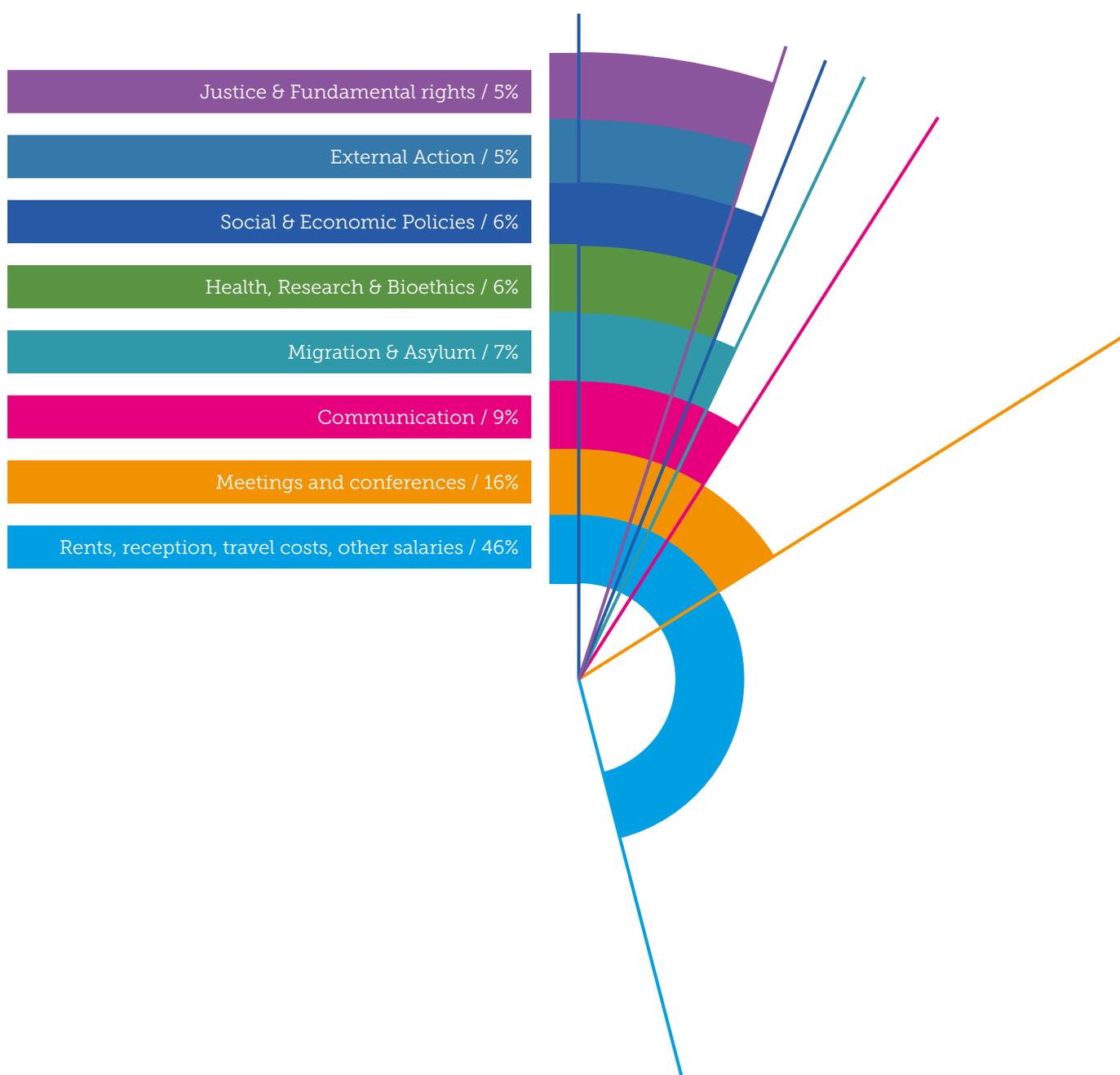
Dorian Winter, Germany
Fr. Felipe Herrera Espaliat, Chile
Ruth Aigner, Germany

FINANCES

Total expenditure: 1.135.000 €

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