



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

*BUILDING TRUST AMONG CITIZENS  
IN THE FUTURE OF EUROPE*

*Statement by COMECE  
in view of the European Council of Laeken*

**5 December 2001**

42, rue Stévin  
B – 1000 Bruxelles  
Tél. + 32 (0)2 235 05 10  
Fax + 32 (0)2 230 33 34  
[comece@comece.org](mailto:comece@comece.org)

# *BUILDING TRUST AMONG CITIZENS IN THE FUTURE OF EUROPE*

*Statement by COMECE in view of the European Council of Laeken*

1. The European Union has evolved over the last 50 years: from a coal and steel community to a common market; from a common market to a single market (shortly to be completed by the final stage in the introduction of a single currency); and from a single market to the union in which we live today, with responsibility in areas ranging from justice and home affairs, through social policy, education and the media, to foreign and security policy. Each stage of that evolution has required a reform of the founding Treaties of the EU through an Inter-Governmental Conference. When the leaders of the European Union meet in Laeken, near Brussels, on 14-15 December 2001, they will make a declaration mapping out the timetable and agenda for the process that will lead to the next Inter-Governmental Conference in 2004.
2. The world is currently experiencing a period of great economic and political uncertainty. The decisions taken at the Laeken Summit will have implications for the long-term future of the European Union. In spite of the immediacy of other current international events, neither the summit nor we as citizens should underestimate the importance of these decisions. The Declaration of Laeken will launch a process that should, between now and 2004, answer a number of fundamental questions:

- What should the European Union do?
- How should it be organised to do this most effectively and accountably?
- What are the principles and values on which it should be founded?

It is expected that our heads of state and government will establish a Convention, made up of delegates from the European and national parliaments, the European Commission and the governments of the member states and candidate countries, to propose options for the fundamental reform of the EU.

### **The Value and the Values of the EU**

3. European integration is more than just an economic and political option: it is a synonym for sustainable peace – both inner peace resulting from new forms of social and political co-operation, and outer peace, through the EU’s contribution to global development and resolving conflict. Recent dramatic world events demonstrate the importance of a united Europe, able to speak with one voice on the world stage and to contribute to the global common good by drawing on its experience of solving problems through dialogue, co-operation, solidarity and the promotion of human rights, rather than by the use of force.
4. The Catholic Church has accompanied and supported the process of European integration since its inception, for the purpose of the European Union “is first and foremost to serve the common good of all in order to guarantee justice and harmony”, in the words of Pope John Paul II\*. The values and principles that have guided the integration process, such as the dignity of the human person, solidarity and subsidiarity, are recognised and promoted by the social teaching of the Church.
5. However, despite its continuing contribution to peace and prosperity in Europe and its responsibility for promoting development, justice and freedom elsewhere in the world, the European Union remains for many of its own citizens remote and poorly understood, sometimes even misrepresented and discredited. Too often, both governments and citizens seem to regard it as no more than a marketplace designed to benefit them and protect their national interests, rather than as a community of values, promoting mutual respect, justice and solidarity, which requires their full participation and contribution at all levels.

6. The establishment of a Convention provides a unique opportunity to bring the European Union “closer to its citizens” by involving them more directly in the determination of its future. If the citizens of the EU are to feel that they have a stake, they must have trust: trust in the values and objectives of European integration, trust in the procedures of the European institutions, trust in the people responsible for carrying them out. The work of the Convention should therefore be guided by the same principles as those that guide the process of European integration: the centrality of the human person, solidarity, subsidiarity and transparency.

### **Solidarity, Subsidiarity and Transparency**

7. The future of the European Union will be one shared by all the people of Europe. It is therefore essential that we express our solidarity with those states currently negotiating to become members of the European Union by inviting them to participate in the work of the Convention.
8. Respect for the principle of subsidiarity is a precondition for the effective participation of European citizens in the European democratic process, for it ensures balance and coherence between European institutions, which promote the European common good, and national and local governments. For this reason, the participation of national parliamentarians in the Convention is very important; and their participation could be enhanced by their involving, for example, regional assemblies and local public hearings in the process of consultation. For the Convention to succeed, it must engage the citizens of the European Union at the local level
9. The diverse groups, institutions and organisations belonging to civil society can also contribute in terms of offering their particular analyses of the challenges facing the European Union, of providing a voice to sectors of society not otherwise represented in the Convention, and of promoting the wider public debate. In order to benefit fully from this contribution, the role of civil society in the work of the Convention – and the criteria for the inclusion of organisations under this title – must be clearly defined.

10. For their part, the Churches and religious communities can and wish to make a specific contribution to this process. They represent and safeguard fundamental aspects of the spiritual and religious foundation of Europe. They are committed to serve society – inter alia, in the fields of education, culture and social work – and they play an important role in promoting mutual respect, participation, citizenship, dialogue and reconciliation between the peoples of Europe. The forthcoming enlargement of the European Union, through which the East and West of Europe will be reunited, renders this role even more crucial.
  
11. For the work of the Convention to be credible, and for the reform of the EU to be acceptable to its citizens, the Convention itself must work in an autonomous and transparent way. The EU institutions, national governments and the future members of the Convention share the responsibility of ensuring that all have the opportunity to contribute to its work. The challenge – as with the reform of the EU itself – is not merely to make the process democratically accountable, but to make it visibly democratic. Schools, universities and the media also play an important role in providing citizens with the formation and information necessary to engage in the European democratic process.

### **A Challenge For Us All**

12. We are all affected and challenged by European integration, and the future of the European Union is an issue that should concern every actor in European society. As the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community, we invited the Catholic bishops' conferences of the member states and the candidate countries to reflect on the future of the European Union and if possible to enter into dialogue with their national governments. This statement is a reflection of their discussions and exchanges. COMECE will continue to follow closely the process of reform of the European Union between now and 2004 and, where appropriate, contribute to the work of the Convention on specific issues.
  
13. We encourage all citizens to take an interest in the work of the Convention. We particularly encourage the bishops' conferences and local Catholic organisations to

promote reflection and debate about the future of the European Union, and members of the Catholic community to seek ways of becoming involved in the work of the Convention. Let us take up this unique opportunity to help shape our common future.

Published in Brussels

5 December 2001

***The Bishops of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community:***

*Bishop Josef Homeyer, Bishop of Hildesheim (Germany) – President of COMECE*

*Bishop Adrianus van Luyn, Bishop of Rotterdam (Netherlands) – Vice-President of COMECE*

*Bishop Attilio Nicora, Italian Bishops' Conference – Vice-President of COMECE*

*Bishop John Crowley, Bishop of Middlesbrough (England and Wales)*

*Bishop Luk De Hovre, Auxiliary Bishop of Mechelen-Brussels (Belgium)*

*Bishop Joseph Duffy, Bishop of Clogher (Ireland)*

*Bishop Teodoro de Faria, Bishop of Funchal (Portugal)*

*Archbishop Fernand Franck, Archbishop of Luxembourg*

*Bishop Egon Kapellari, Bishop of Graz-Seckau (Austria)*

*Bishop William Kenney, Auxiliary Bishop of Stockholm (Sweden)*

*Bishop John Mone, Bishop of Paisley (Scotland)*

*Bishop Hippolyte Simon, Bishop of Clermont (France)*

*Archbishop Antonios Varthalitis, Archbishop of Corfu (Greece)*

*Archbishop Elias Yanes Alvarez, Archbishop of Zaragoza (Spain)*

---

\* Speech to a group of European parliamentarians, 10 November 1983