



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

An opportunity to make our values real

COMECE Statement in view of the Elections to the
European Parliament on 10-13 June 2004

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Between 10 and 13 June 2004, the voters of the 25 Member States of the European Union –now with 450 million inhabitants – will elect 732 people to represent them in the European Parliament for the next five years. Never before in the western world have so many people been called to vote in the same election.

It is worth recalling that the accession of 10 new Member States on 1 May signifies that our continent has finally overcome the divisions inherited from the accords of Yalta. In both east and west, this project of European integration is a response to the war and totalitarianism that has scarred Europe's recent history. By voting in this election, each one of us will benefit from the privilege of peace and democracy that was denied to our forebears. It is a privilege still denied to millions of others around the globe.

Why vote in the European elections?

The European Parliament is one of the three principal institutions of the European Union. Since the first direct election 25 years ago, its powers have grown considerably. Together with the Council of Ministers, representing national governments, it adopts laws that affect many aspects of our daily lives. As the direct expression of the will of EU citizens, it creates pressure for political action at the European level. It holds the European Commission and other EU agencies accountable for their actions, and it has the final say on how the EU budget is spent. Anyone who dismisses it as a “talking shop” is missing out on a significant part of the European democratic decision-making process.

The legitimacy and authority of Members of the next European Parliament to represent the values and interests of EU citizens will depend on the commitment of those citizens to go out and vote between 10 and 13 June of this year. For this reason, we all have both an interest and a moral duty to participate in the European elections.

What is at stake?

The next European Parliament will address problems that concern us today and will have an impact on future generations. The European elections should not therefore be regarded as a popularity test for our national governments. We encourage Catholics, and voters of all faiths and none, to inform themselves about the candidates and the manifestos of the political parties, and to make their decision according to what they promise to do as Members of the European Parliament for the next five years.

As Christians, we can draw on the lessons of the Gospel and the rich heritage of the Church's social teaching to guide us. On this basis, we can identify the following issues at stake in this election and the following questions that we should ask the candidates:

- **Respect for life:** As Christians, we regard human life as sacred and inviolable from conception to natural death. Although the European Parliament has no competence to legislate on issues such as abortion or euthanasia, will it promote respect for human life at all stages and guarantee it in the funding of scientific research?
- **Safeguarding Creation:** The European Parliament has a decisive influence on legislation to protect our natural environment, prevent pollution and safeguard public health. Will the future MEPs ensure that such legislation preserves the world God has created for us and for future generations rather than serve short-term goals?
- **The common good:** Faced with a changing demographic structure and the pressures of globalisation, our model of society based on sustainable economic growth and solidarity with the poorest and most vulnerable is more valuable than ever. How will the next Parliament balance the necessary reforms with these basic values?
- **Support for the family:** EU legislation has an indirect but significant impact on family life in many areas. For most Europeans, the family is the primary source of security, stability, healthcare, education and well-being. How will MEPs balance respect for diversity with support for the family founded on marriage as the basic unit of society?
- **Education, culture and youth:** Economic and social development will be based more and more on knowledge. It is thus fundamental that the EU recognises the person at the centre of education and training systems. Will the future MEPs promote the right of parents to choose freely the education of their children, without economic discrimination and according to their convictions, in support of the action of Member States?
- **Welcoming strangers:** Jesus Christ sets us the example of how to welcome strangers in our society. As the EU develops common policies on asylum and immigration, will the new Parliament continue the commitment of its predecessor to ensuring the humane and fair treatment of refugees and migrants?
- **Peace, security and freedom:** In a world gripped by the fear of terrorism, will MEPs support policies that balance the need for security with the respect of human dignity and human rights? Will they encourage actions that address the root causes of terrorism, promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts and uphold international law?
- **Justice for the world's poor:** The European Union's policies on development and trade directly affect the living conditions of the world's poorest people. How will the next Parliament ensure the EU implements what the Church calls the "preferential option for the poor" and respects the dignity of people in the developing world?
- **Honesty in public life:** One of the most important functions of the European Parliament is to hold the Commission and other EU agencies to account. What efforts will future MEPs take to uphold a code of ethical conduct and to guarantee honesty, transparency and probity both in the rest of the EU system and in their own ranks?
- **Unity in diversity through subsidiarity:** The European Parliament is an expression of both the unity and the diversity of the EU. How will its Members promote the development of a true European democracy whilst at the same time respecting the cultural, social and political diversity of the Union and the principle of subsidiarity?
- **Dialogue with religions:** The need for dialogue between religions, political institutions and civil society is clearer than ever. What will the new Parliament do to engage in a dialogue that recognises the specific identity and contribution of religious communities for society as a whole?

- **Our Christian heritage:** One of the first tasks of the new Parliament will probably be to adopt a recommendation on the new Constitutional Treaty of the European Union. We take this opportunity to renew our commitment to uphold the values enshrined in the Constitution and to recall the proposal we have made with other churches for an open and inclusive reference to Europe's Christian heritage in the preamble.

At stake in these European elections therefore are fundamental values. Only by voting in these elections will Catholics be able to help realise the dream of Pope John Paul II of a European Union, "of men and women committed to bearing the fruit of these values, putting themselves at the service of all for the sake of a Europe of the human person, in which the face of God is reflected" (24 March 2004).

Brussels, 10 May 2004

- ✘ Josef Homeyer, President, Bishop of Hildesheim, Germany
- ✘ Adrianus van Luyn S.D.B., Vice-President, Bishop of Rotterdam, Netherlands
- ✘ Hippolyte Simon, Vice-President, Archbishop of Clermont, France
- ✘ John Crowley, Bishop of Middlesbrough, England and Wales
- ✘ Jozef De Kesel, Auxiliary Bishop of Brussels-Mechelen, Belgium
- ✘ Joseph Duffy, Bishop of Clogher, Ireland
- ✘ Teodoro de Faria, Bishop of Funchal, Portugal
- ✘ Fernand Franck, Archbishop of Luxembourg
- ✘ Egon Kapellari, Bishop of Graz-Seckau, Austria
- ✘ William Kenney C.P., Auxiliary Bishop of Stockholm, Sweden
- ✘ Václav Malý, Auxiliary Bishop of Prague, Czech Republic
- ✘ Joseph Mercieca, Archbishop of Malta
- ✘ Giuseppe Merisi, Auxiliary Bishop of Milan, Italy
- ✘ Peter A. Moran, Bishop of Aberdeen, Scotland
- ✘ Henryk Muszynski, Archbishop of Gniezno, Poland
- ✘ Frantisek Rábek, Bishop of the Armed Forces, Slovakia
- ✘ Ioannes Spiteris, Archbishop of Corfu, Greece
- ✘ Anton Stres C.M., Auxiliary Bishop of Maribor, Slovenia
- ✘ András Veres, Auxiliary Bishop of Eger, Hungary
- ✘ Elías Yanez Álvarez, Archbishop of Zaragoza, Spain