



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

A plea for a European strategy in favour of families

Brussels, Autumn Plenary, 16-18 November 2005

With the publication of the Green Paper, the European Commission has launched a large consultation on demographic changes. We, the bishops of COMECE, salute this initiative of the European Commission. An ageing population and an insufficient birth rate require a range of measures, of which a policy for a responsible management of migration is one. Nevertheless, in order to tackle the problem at its source, we think that it is necessary above all to promote the family and support married couples.

Efforts must be undertaken at all political levels to undo the structural marginalisation of the family in society. Whilst fully respecting the principle of subsidiarity and the competence of the member states in the field of family law and policy, the European Union must also contribute to the promotion of the family, since its policies and legislation indirectly influence the situation of the family in Europe. For this reason we request that responding to the demographic changes in Europe, the European Commission develops a strategy in favour of families.

This strategy could include 'family mainstreaming', and thus provide for the evaluation of European policies and of community law on the promotion of the family, and to promote legislative measures to better reconcile employment and family life. Equally it should institutionalise the exchange of good practice in family policy matters between member states. With the same purpose, a European Forum open to associations and movements could be created.

A European strategy for the family will take as its point of departure the deep personal experience of marriage as a bond between a woman and a man. This experience is the basis of the Catholic Church's vision of marriage as a sacrament and as a sign of God's presence. It is the conviction of believers that this sacrament is a unique bond, indissoluble and open for the gift of new life. Thus, it is a realisation of God's love. Marriage is the foundation of the family, the community of life and love, on which society is built. Inspired by this

understanding, we the Bishops of COMECE, will continue to make our contribution to the future European debate on demographic changes.

Bishop Josef Homeyer (Germany) – President of COMECE;

Bishop Adrianus van Luyn (The Netherlands) – Vice-President of COMECE;

Archbishop Hippolyte Simon (France) – Vice-President of COMECE;

Bishop Jozef De Kesel (Belgium);

Archbishop Fernand Franck (Luxembourg);

Bishop Piotr Jarecki (Poland);

Bishop Anton Justs (Latvia);

Bishop Egon Kapellari (Austria);

Bishop William Kenny (Scandinavia);

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin (Ireland);

Archbishop Joseph Mercieca (Malta);

Bishop Peter Moran (Scotland);

Bishop Rimantas Norvila (Lithuania);

Bishop Frantisek Rábek (Slovakia);

Bishop Anton Stres (Slovenia);

Bishop Amândio José Tomás (Portugal);

Bishop András Veres (Hungary);

Archbishop Elias Yanes Alvarez (Spain).

Brussels, 18 November 2005