

This language version of the Statutes of COMECE is a simple courtesy translation of its only official language version (Italian).



STATUTE OF THE COMMISSION OF THE EPISCOPATES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (COMECE)

*Adopted unanimously at the Plenary Assembly of Rome, on 26 October 2017
[approved by the Vatican Secretariat of State on 22 January 2018]*

PREAMBLE

Starting from 1950, following two World Wars, the European Nations and Peoples engaged in a cooperative venture that gave life to a new reality, promoting peace and solidarity in the European continent.

Motivated by the Christian inspiration of its founding fathers, the European project positioned itself in the search for the common good, placing at the centre of its action the respect for human dignity.

Taking note of the relevance of this new reality that had come into existence, and with the aim of promoting the Christian dimension of the process, the Bishops of the countries of the European Community constituted on 3 March 1980, with the approval of the Holy See, the Commission of the Episcopates of the European Community (COMECE) in order to bring about the collaboration mentioned in the fifth paragraph of this Preamble.

The membership of the Commission was expanded in keeping with developments in the process towards European unity.

The Episcopates of the Member States of the European Union recognise in the Union an area of particular responsibility for the exercise of their pastoral task and, for that purpose, establish among themselves “a reciprocal openness and a fraternal collaboration (...) in the service of evangelisation” (John Paul II) in the process of European integration. The collaboration between the Episcopal Conferences of the European Community shall take place in a way that promotes and protects the common good, in the light of the joy of the Gospel of Christ.

COMECE partners the political process of the European Union in the areas of interest to the Episcopates of the European Union; it monitors the activities of the European Union and informs in this regard the Episcopates of the European Union; it communicates to the European institutions and authorities the opinions and views of the Episcopates of the European Union concerning European integration.

I – THE COMECE

Art. 1

The Commission of the Episcopates of the European Union (COMECE) brings together the bishops who represent the Episcopates of the Member States of the European Union with the aim of pursuing, in a spirit of collegiality, a closer collaboration among the said Episcopates, with regard to the pastoral questions connected to the development of the competences and activities of the Union.

Art. 2

1. In the exercise of its pastoral responsibility concerning European questions, the COMECE collaborates with the Apostolic Nuncio accredited to the European Union, respecting and upholding the special role that is proper to the Holy See of guaranteeing and promoting those relationships which have relevance in international law.
2. The Apostolic Nuncio accredited to the European Union is always invited to take part in the meetings of the Assembly and of the Standing Committee of the COMECE.

Art. 3

1. The COMECE is formed from the Bishops delegated by the Episcopate of each of the Member States of the European Union, without prejudice to the fact that a single Bishop represents the Episcopates of the Kingdom of Denmark, the Kingdom of Sweden, and the Republic of Finland.

Until the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, 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.

2. The following are equally members of COMECE:
 - The Archbishop of Luxembourg;
 - The Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus;
 - The Apostolic Administrator of Estonia.
3. The competent Episcopate delegates a Bishop, preferably diocesan, in possession of an office.
4. The mandate of the Bishop delegate lasts for a period of five years and is renewable.
5. Each Episcopate shall have the right to appoint another among its members as a substitute delegate, who will participate, in accordance with the modalities established in the Regulation, to the meetings of COMECE in case the Bishop delegate is impeded to participate.

Art. 4

The following constitute the bodies of the COMECE:

- a) the Assembly;
- b) the President;
- c) the Standing Committee;
- d) the Secretary General.

II – THE ASSEMBLY

Art. 5

1. The Assembly is composed of the Bishops delegated at the Commission.
2. It is the duty of the Assembly:
 - a) to take the necessary decisions to realise the aims mentioned in Article 1;
 - b) to elect the President, the members of the Standing Committee, and to appoint the Secretary General;
 - c) to organise the duties and services of the Secretariat and to give directions to the Secretary General for the conduct of its activities;
 - d) to set up any eventual fixed-term commissions or working groups, with exclusively consultative or preparatory functions and without prejudice to the competences of the bodies of COMECE;
 - e) to approve public declarations that bind the authority of the COMECE;
 - f) to decide on the sourcing of the economic resources necessary for the functioning of the COMECE, to supervise their correct administration, and to approve the annual budget and the final balance;
 - g) to approve the annual report on activity carried out by the COMECE, prepared by the Secretary General;
 - h) to approve, by a majority of at least two-thirds of the members, any eventual modifications of the Statute of the COMECE, to be subsequently presented to the Holy See for its recognitio;
 - i) to establish the Regulation of the COMECE and to approve any eventual modifications of it, to the purpose of implementing and in compliance with the provisions of the present Statute.

Art. 6

It is the responsibility of the Bishops delegated at the COMECE to inform in an adequate manner the Episcopal Conference to which they belong on the directions and activities of the COMECE, and to inform the latter on the views of their own Episcopal Conference, helping the Bishops of their own countries both in developing an awareness of the cultural, juridical and political importance of the European Union, and in sharing the pastoral responsibilities that arise out of it. The Bishops delegated at the COMECE also encourage the Episcopal Conference to which they belong to equip itself with the tools suitable for the study of the main problems concerning the competences of the Union and for offering to the COMECE the contribution of specific reflections and proposals.

Art. 7

1. The Assembly meets at least twice each year after having being convoked by the President, who establishes the agenda of the meeting.
2. When the majority of the Standing Committee or at least one-third of the Bishop members of the Assembly make a request and specify the matters on the agenda, the President summons an extraordinary meeting.
3. Meetings are valid when at least half the members of the Assembly are present. Decisions are valid when they obtain an absolute majority from those present.

4. The Secretary General ordinarily participates in the meetings, without the right to vote.
5. Recognised experts, invited by the Standing Committee, can take part in the meetings, without the right to vote, in order to assist in a deeper understanding of some matters on the agenda.

III – THE PRESIDENT

Art. 8

1. The Bishop President of the COMECE is elected by the Assembly from among its members. For the validity of the election the majority of two-thirds of the members of the Assembly is required at the first two ballots. At an eventual third ballot, voting continues between the two candidates who received the greater number of votes in the previous ballot, or, in case of tie, who are senior by Episcopal ordination. In case of tie at the third ballot, the candidate who is most senior by Episcopal ordination prevails.
2. The President's mandate lasts for five years and is renewable only once.

Art. 9

1. The President represents COMECE.
2. The President directs and organises the activities of the COMECE and promotes its development. It falls to him in the first place to engage in opportune contacts with the bodies of the European Union.

Art. 10

Should the President be impeded, meetings of the Assembly and of the Standing Committee are presided over by the First Vice-President or, in his absence, by one of the other Vice-Presidents, on the basis of the choice made by the members who are present.

IV – THE STANDING COMMITTEE

Art. 11

1. The Standing Committee is composed of the President of the COMECE and four Bishops elected by the Assembly from among its members with care taken to ensure that they are representative of the geographical distribution of the Episcopates of the European Union.
2. The four Bishops elected fulfil the role of Vice-Presidents of the COMECE. Their mandate lasts for a period of five years and is renewable only once. One of them is designated by the Standing Committee as First Vice-President, with the task of chairing meetings of the Assembly and of the Standing Committee, when the President is legitimately impeded.
3. Where one member of the Standing Committee ceases to hold office, the Assembly elects a new member, who remains in office until the term of the mandate of the Committee expires.
4. The Standing Committee meets in accordance with the modalities established in the Regulation.

5. If not elected, the representative of the Belgian Bishops' Conference is invited, without the right to vote, to the meetings of the Standing Committee when questions that concern the relations of the COMECE with the local administration are under discussion.

Art. 12

It is the duty of the Standing Committee:

- a. to prepare the matters to be submitted to the Assembly for examination;
- b. to take care of the implementation phase of the Assembly's decisions;
- c. to issue, in case of necessity and on its own authority, acts or declarations;
- d. to verify and promote the well-ordered and effective functioning of the Secretariat;
- e. to verify the regularity of the administrative management and to safeguard the correct relationship between operating expenses and available resources.

Art. 13

1. The Standing Committee meets twice each year and as often as the President considers it appropriate or at least three of its members request it.
2. The Standing Committee takes decisions in the presence of at least three of its members and by a majority of all its members; in case of parity, the President's vote or, where he is absent because impeded, that of the First Vice-President prevails. In case of urgency, or where it is not possible to hold a meeting, the President can take decisions that cannot be deferred, after having sought the opinion of the other members of the Committee.

V – THE GENERAL SECRETARY

Art. 14

1. The General Secretary of COMECE is a priest appointed by the Assembly among one or more candidates proposed by the Standing Committee, with the prior nihil obstat of the Holy See.
2. The General Secretary remains in office for a four years period which can be renewed twice.

Art. 15

The General Secretary of the COMECE is at the service of the Assembly and of the Standing Committee and operates under the authority of the President.

Art. 16

It is the duty of the General Secretary of COMECE:

- a) to put into effect the directives of the President and of the Standing Committee;
- b) to maintain opportune contacts with the bodies of the Union and with the European institutions, representing COMECE, where necessary, as may be delegated by the President;
- c) to promote relations with the Apostolic Nunciature accredited to the European Union, with the Episcopal Conferences, with the Consilium Conferentiarum Episcoporum Europae (C.C.E.E.), and with other bodies that are relevant to the aims of COMECE, and

maintain contacts with the Permanent Observer of the Holy See at the Council of Europe;

- d) to study the problems concerning the competences and activities of the European Union and the lines of development of its institutions;
- e) to prepare the acts or declarations to be submitted for the approval of the Standing Committee or the Assembly;
- f) to prepare the instruments and services necessary for the meetings of the Standing Committee and of the Assembly;
- g) to draw up an annual report on the activities carried out by the COMECE;
- h) to take care of the administrative management, to prepare the annual budget and the final balance and to present to the Assembly assessments and proposals about the resources necessary for the functioning of the COMECE;
- i) to ensure by appropriate instruments that regular information about European problems and the activity of the COMECE is given to the Episcopates of the States of the Union and to other interested bodies.

Art. 17

1. The Secretary General calls on the work of permanent collaborators who, along with him, constitute the Secretariat of COMECE.
2. The Secretariat of COMECE has its registered office in Brussels and is composed of services set up according to the provisions of the Assembly on a proposal of the Secretary General.
3. The members of the Secretariat are bound to respect the confidential nature of the decisions and administrative acts of the COMECE.
4. The Secretary General, in conformity with the directions established by the Assembly and by the Standing Committee, can issue notes and comments from the General Secretariat on specific problems concerning the decision-making processes of the European Union.

VI – RELATIONS WITH ECCLESIAL BODIES

Art. 18

COMECE exercises its functions in close community with the Consilium Conferentiarum Episcoporum Europae (C.C.E.E.) and its bodies.

Art. 19

1. COMECE seeks appropriate forms of collaboration with international meetings of Episcopal Conferences concerned with the fields of competence of the European Union.
2. The COMECE encourages frameworks and openings for engagement and collaboration with those European Catholic organisations having aims related to the activity of the European Union.

VII – RELATIONS ON THE ECUMENICAL LEVEL

Art. 20

The COMECE cultivates fraternal and constructive relations with the organisations of the Churches and ecclesial communities that take an interest in European problems, in order to ensure greater effectiveness in presenting common positions vis-à-vis the institutions of the European Union.

VIII – RELATIONS AT THE INTERRELIGIOUS LEVEL

Art. 21

The COMECE seeks dialogue and discussion with non-Christian religious confessions on questions concerning the process of European unity, in order to better safeguard religious freedom in Europe and promote a European citizenship founded on the rights of the human person, on reciprocal acceptance, and on a just and peaceful co-existence.

IX – FINAL PROVISIONS

Art. 22

1. The following elements are regulated with a separate Regulation:
 - a. Modalities for the convocation of, participation to and conduction of the Assembly and the Standing Committee;
 - b. Modalities for voting by the Assembly and the Standing Committee;
 - c. Implementation of the provisions of the present Statute, insofar as it is strictly necessary.
2. The provisions of the Regulation that are not conform to the provisions of the present Statute are null and void.

Art. 23

1. In order to ensure the civil status of its activity, COMECE organises itself in accordance with the legal requirements of the State in which it has its registered office.
2. The patrimony of COMECE consists of the real estate with which it is endowed and of any legacies and donations intended to increase it.
3. The ordinary functioning of the bodies and the exercise of their activities is provided for through the revenues of the patrimony and the contributions given annually by the Episcopates of the Member States in accordance with the criteria approved by the Assembly.

Art. 24

In the event of closure of the COMECE it falls to the Assembly, having listened to the Holy See, to make the provisions that are necessary for the liquidation and transferal of the patrimony, in full compliance with Article 23, paragraph 1.

Art. 25

The official text of the present Statute is that drawn up in Italian.