



COMECE Annual Report --- 2022



The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences
of the European Union

Index

01

FOREWORD

03

3RD EUROPEAN CATHOLIC SOCIAL DAYS

09

DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHURCHES AND THE EU
(ARTICLE 17 TFEU)

13

MIGRATION & ASYLUM

17

ETHICS, RESEARCH & HEALTH

21

ECOLOGY, ENERGY AND AGRICULTURE

24

LEGAL AFFAIRS & FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

27

SOCIAL & ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

31

EU EXTERNAL ACTION

36

EDUCATION & CULTURE

40

INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

43

YOUTH POLICIES

46

COMMUNICATION

48

COMECE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
AND AUDIENCE WITH THE HOLY FATHER

50

COMECE PRESIDENCY

51

BISHOPS DELEGATED TO COMECE

53

SECRETARIAT STAFF

55

FINANCES



*Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ,
President of COMECE, during a
press conference at the Vatican.*

FOREWORD

▲ **At the start of 2022, we thought the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic was the biggest challenge ahead of us. We were mistaken. Our Ukrainian sisters and brothers know this better than anyone.**

With the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, war is back in the European continent, with its brutality and inhuman violence.

This war has placed on us a daunting task: to ensure a just and fair recovery from the pandemic while facing the heavy consequences that the conflict is having and will have in Europe and beyond.

As COMECE, we are here to accompany the European Union in its daily efforts. We would not comply with our mission if we were to remain silent, allowing events to unfold before us without taking a stance.

It is our responsibility as Church leaders to make sure – we need to be a compass for our faithful and contribute to social action - that the strength of the European Union is maintained, as we did facing the pandemic.

What we are witnessing today is a clash of systems, an earthquake for consolidated frameworks, the disregard for human rights, man's dignity and the value of life. The world needs a strong EU as a positive actor on the international stage, promoting peace, justice and the rule of law.

During 2022, COMECE made repeated appeals for peace. Some may doubt their impact and resonance in the political world, but calling for peace and justice is part of our duty as Church. I can only repeat the words of Pope Francis, who qualifies this war a *'pazzia'*: madness. Escalation must be avoided. Dialogue and justice must prevail.

When I speak of peace, I also refer to peace within EU Member States. Indeed, the risk of widespread poverty in Europe may have dramatic consequences, given the growing vulnerability of our societies.

My concern is also the psychological impact of the current grave crisis' on young people. We, along with the institutions of the European Union, need to hear their voices. We need to promote and empower the youth.

With this in mind, COMECE has launched the initiative of a Youth Net: a consultative group of young people directly linked to the EU Bishops' Conferences that will be instrumental in supporting our activities.

The severe economic consequences of the war are a wake-up call for our citizens. Let us think of the toxic combination of hyper-consumerism and careless waste. During his Pontificate, Pope Francis has sent many



Ukrainian refugees crossing the border between Ukraine and Poland.

powerful messages in this regard. Now, nobody can look the other way anymore. A renewed sense of moderation will have to become an element of our lives.

Another key issue is the enlargement of the Union and the relations with neighbouring countries. It is crucial to work to maintain this as an EU high priority. Nurturing close relations with the Church in candidate countries is also essential. Long and complicated enlargement processes will only lead to disappointment and frustration on the part of candidate countries, who might turn to international actors who do not want the best for our continent.

In April 2022, in just a few hours, I had the opportunity to witness hundreds of Ukrainian women and children crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border, desperately seeking shelter in the EU.



Card. Hollerich Mgr. Budzik in Lublin (Poland) discussing with a group of volunteers of Caritas Poland gathering essential goods for the Ukrainian population.

While in Slovakia and Poland, I also met with many women and men, people of different nationalities, faith and age, who have welcomed and accompanied people fleeing from the conflict, providing them with a roof above their heads, essential goods and psychological and pastoral support.

These people shared their humanity with a suffering neighbour. This is real solidarity. In this turbulent and dark period, may this inspiring example of solidarity be the guiding light. Not only for every Catholic and religious leader but also for the actions of the European Union. ▀

+ Jean-Claude
Hollerich SJ

Jean-Claude Card. Hollerich S.J.

President of COMECE
Archbishop of Luxembourg

3RD EUROPEAN CATHOLIC SOCIAL DAYS BRATISLAVA, 17-20 MARCH 2022

“Europe beyond the pandemic: a new beginning”
“European societies in Transition:
a Christian contribution towards Solidarity and Social justice”



© Slovak Bishops' Conference

Panoramic view of the St. Martin's Cathedral and of the Castle of Bratislava (Slovakia)

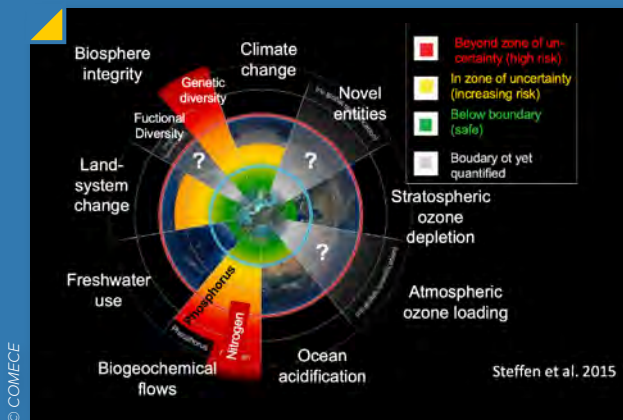
▲ Around 200 people delegated by the Bishops' Conferences of Europe came from all across the continent to participate in the 3rd European Catholic Social Days, held in Bratislava (Slovakia) on 17-20 March 2022.

Organised by COMECE, CCEE and the Slovak Bishops' Conference, in collaboration with the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human

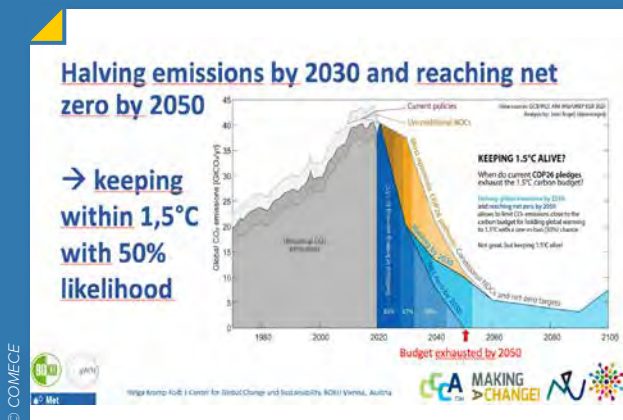
Development, the event was an arena to reflect and debate on creative ways to promote a just recovery in Europe and to contribute - from a Catholic perspective - to the rebuilding process of the political, economic and societal systems of our societies, which ended up severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the event, representatives of the Catholic Church, civic society and of the EU institutions and national authorities promoted dialogue on social justice, reflecting and debating on three major transitions that characterise Europe in this historic moment:

- The demographic transition and family life;
- The technological and digital transition;
- The ecological transition.



Infographic from the workshop on the demographic transition and family life.



Infographic from the workshop on the ecological transition.

The brutal Russian aggression against Ukraine since February 2022 changed the European and international context, worsening the already precarious reality caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The war on European soil changed the agenda and the priorities of the EU and its Member States, with a significant focus on defence and security issues.

Nevertheless, participants highlighted that addressing those three transformations cannot be postponed. Indeed, without specific policies, the ecological crisis and demographic decline will negatively affect our societies. Moreover, if inclusive and social policies do not accompany the ongoing transformation of the labour market, the digitalisation of many aspects of our life may risk excluding the most vulnerable members of our communities.

The 3rd edition of the European Catholic Social Days allowed restating the need to promote the active participation of Catholics in the European and national political context in addressing demographic imbalances, technological disruption and ecological injustices, contributing to the process of discernment on European social issues.

PARTICIPANTS

Young people, Church representatives, EU and national politicians, academics, and members of Catholic social movements and organisations. In total, around 200 people from all over Europe gathered to address and discuss the best ways to meet the “joys and hopes, fears and aspirations” of men and women of goodwill in today’s world. The many young people who attended all event sessions demonstrated creativity and dynamism, highlighting their crucial role in shaping the future of Europe.



Young participant of the 3rd European Catholic Social Days.



Audience of the 3rd European Catholic Social Days.

Significant contributions were made by the President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová, and by representatives of the Holy See and Pope Francis himself, who addressed the participants with a message focused on the war and the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.



HISTORY

In 2009 COMECE organised the first edition of the European Catholic Social Days, under the theme “Catholic Social Days for Europe”. The event took place in Gdansk (Poland) and focused on the following topics: a) Solidarity as a grounding value of the EU, b) the human person and his rights; b) Families in Europe, d) the European socio-economic model; c) Global common good; d) Solidarity towards future generations and the role of the EU in the protection of the environment



In 2014, COMECE, CCEE, along with the Archdiocese of Madrid and the support of the Spanish Bishops' Conference, organised in Madrid (Spain), the 2nd Catholic Social Days for Europe. The central theme was “Christian fate and the future of Europe”.

POPE FRANCIS

While thanking all those who acted with a “prompt and coordinated response in coming to the aid of the people, guaranteeing them material help, shelter and hospitality”, the Holy Father prayed for a general “commitment to rebuild an architecture of peace at the global level, where the European home, born to guarantee peace after the world wars, plays a primary role [...]. The distressing cry for help of our Ukrainian brothers and sisters urges us as a community of believers not only to reflect seriously, but to weep with them and to do something for them; to share the anguish of a people whose identity, history and tradition have been wounded [...] Once again humanity is threatened by a perverse abuse of power and vested interest, which condemns defenseless people to suffer all forms of brutal violence”. ▀



Pope Francis addressed a message to the participants of the 3rd European Catholic Social Days.



Card. Hollerich addressing the audience of the 3rd edition of the European Catholic Social Days.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

"All the moral and spiritual qualities that we are discovering and mobilising in ourselves today will undoubtedly be needed in the future, when we face the challenges that lie ahead. The war has erupted at a moment when our continent is facing a number of serious and interlinked challenges, including the climate crisis, ageing, changes in the labour market and social inequalities".

CARD. HOLLERICH (COMECE)

"Acting as a community means developing a spirit of fraternity and solidarity, against individualism and conflicts, in order to face together the challenges that Europe faces, [therefore] I invite you to rediscover together our vocation to fraternity, and to reflect and debate on the way forward towards a just recovery in Europe, leaving no one behind. And while we are talking about solidarity, I wish to reiterate once again our fraternal closeness and solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Ukraine, as well as with those fleeing the horrors of war, while thanking the Church and many volunteers in Ukraine, Slovakia and other neighbouring countries for their humanitarian efforts and pastoral care."



Zuzana Čaputová, President of the Republic of Slovakia, while being interviewed by the press.



Card. Czerny, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

CARD. CZERNY (HOLY SEE)

"How do we, as Christian or non-Christian citizens, as laity or clergy and hierarchy, contribute to peace in Europe? Such an examination of conscience invites us to meditate on the violent history of the 20th century and the first 20 years of the 21st. The vocabulary and thinking of such an examen may be found in 'Fratelli tutti'".

MGR. ZVOLENSKY (SLOVAK BISHOPS' CONFERENCE)

"In the spirit of the encouragement of the Holy Father Francis, we do not want to succumb to a culture of disinterest, but to build a culture that serves life, that is inspired by the Gospel, that takes notice of the poorest, that does not discard anyone, that leaves no one behind."



Mgr. Zvolensky, President of the Conference of Slovak Bishops.



Mgr. Grušas, President of CCEE

MGR. GRUŠAS (CCEE)

"Whether we are discussing demographic changes and family challenges, developments in technology and digital transitions, or the recovery of our environment, our response must be Christ centered. Without God at the center of our lives and our work, we would create a social justice system as vacuous as the one that the atheistic communist system attempted to create for their unattainable ideal society."



The President of COMECE presides the Holy Mass celebrated at the St. Martin's Cathedral in Bratislava.

“It is fundamental to maintain a constructive dialogue and interaction with the EU institutions, in line with Article 17 TFEU, which should be content-based and effectively address key points of EU policy.”

(CARD. JEAN-CLAUDE HOLLERICH S.J.)

DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHURCHES AND THE EU **(ARTICLE 17.3 TFEU)**

▲ **The formulation of Article 17.3 TFEU establishes the foundations of EU-Churches dialogue by providing that “Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations”.**

Both parties acknowledge that Article 17 TFEU Dialogue is an obligation and not a mere option while underlining that it should not be a goal but lead to a genuine enrichment of EU policies and initiatives from a religious perspective.

The year 2022 was marked by a deep self-reflection on the side of Churches on the way forward and on addressing some challenges that emerged in implementing the Dialogue. This was done in full and frank interaction with the relevant

European Commission’s Coordinator so as to foster improvements to procedures and practices.

In this context, Churches emphasised the relevance of Article 17.3 TFEU in strengthening the European project and its support in the Member States. For this reason, Churches called for productive occasions of dialogue that move beyond the symbolic aspect. A format featuring both religious and non-confessional actors was discarded in light of the strong reservations expressed by Churches, especially concerning the *“unsuccessful joint format of the 2022 High-level meeting”*.

On the EU Council side, the tradition of Churches meetings with rotating Presidencies continued through fruitful exchanges on the respective priority areas with the French Permanent Representation to the EU and the Czech government.

High-level meeting of EU and religious leaders



Screenshot of a session of the High-Level Meeting of EU and Religious leaders held online on 14 January 2022. The meeting was hosted by EC Vice-Presidents Margaritis Schinas and Dubravka Šuica.

On 14 January 2022, European Commission's Vice-President Margaritis Schinas hosted the annual Article 17 High-Level Meeting on the Conference of the Future of Europe, gathering leaders drawn from religious and non-confessional organisations.

Vice-President Dubravka Šuica, co-chair of the Executive Board of the Conference on the Future of Europe, updated participants on recent developments and the next steps at the Conference. This was the first high-level meeting gathering representatives from religious and non-confessional organisations.

As Vice-President Schinas explained, this format was justified by the specific topic of the meeting, which should be seen as part of the ongoing discussions on the future of Europe with the presence of Vice-President Šuica.

All participants expressed their appreciation for the invitation and underlined their commitment to contributing to the discussion on the future of Europe. The main issues raised concerned on climate change, migration and asylum, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and European democracy, including the future of the role of citizens' panels and the need to uphold the rule of law.

Meeting with the French Permanent Representation to the EU

On 7 March 2022, representatives of COMECE and CEC met with Ambassador Philippe Leglise-Costa - Permanent Representative of France to the European Union. The meeting was an occasion to share with him the Contribution of COMECE and CEC to the French EU Presidency Programme: "Recovery, Strength and a sense of Belonging".

The document gathered a series of concrete policy recommendations, from promoting a fair and just recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic to developing a European strategic culture of peace with human security at its heart.

The document also included recommendations on EU migration and asylum policies, the EU-Africa partnership, digital transition-AI, the ecological transition, employment, worker's conditions and a responsible and sustainable market economy, the Conference on the Future of Europe, freedom of religion, health, fundamental rights and the fight against antisemitism, education and culture.

During the meeting, Churches also shared their concerns on the ongoing Russian military invasion of Ukraine, urging the EU to tirelessly seek a peaceful solution to the conflict while ensuring safe humanitarian corridors and welcoming refugees fleeing the war.



Representatives of COMECE and CEC meeting with Ambassador Philippe Leglise-Costa, Permanent Representative of France to the European Union in the context of the French EU Presidency. The meeting took place in Brussels on 7 March 2022.

Meeting with the Czech Presidency of the EU Council



© Czech government

Ecumenical delegation with members from COMECE and CEC are received by Petr Fiala, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic in the context of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU. The meeting took place in Prague on 7 December 2022 and featured the participation of local Churches.

An ecumenical delegation with members from COMECE and CEC met with Petr Fiala, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, on 7 December 2022 to discuss efforts of the current EU Presidency in addressing some of the most pressing challenges the EU and its citizens are facing today.

Churches' representatives also expressed their grave concern for the most vulnerable members of EU societies, negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and now exposed to additional socio-economic burdens and increased poverty levels due to the rising cost of living.

In this context, the delegation also highlighted the importance of tackling the current emergency by ensuring accessible and affordable energy while promoting responsible energy consumption and pursuing the long-term objective and a just and sustainable transition.

Finally, COMECE and CEC also recalled the need for decision-makers to answer in a credible way to the European aspirations of Ukraine, along with other countries, notably in the Western Balkans.

Dialogue Seminar at the European Parliament on the humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine

Following his recent visit to Poland and Ukraine, the General Secretary of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) H.E. Mgr. Robert J. Vitillo participated on behalf of COMECE in an Article 17 Dialogue meeting at the European Parliament on the Humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine. The event took place on 12 July 2022, and it was hosted by Othmar Karas, First Vice-President of the European Parliament and responsible for Article 17 TFEU.

In his intervention, Mgr. Vitillo highlighted the multiple actions taken by the Catholic Church and its organizations to address humanitarian challenges posed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.



© COMECE

H.E. Mgr. Robert J. Vitillo, General Secretary of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) participating, on behalf of COMECE, in the Article 17 Dialogue meeting held at the European Parliament on the Humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine. The event took place on 12 July 2022.

Plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe



Rev. Christian Krieger, President of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) participating, also on behalf of COMECE in the Third Plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) held in Strasbourg on 21-22 January 2022.

Churches participated in the Third Plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), titled “The future is in your hands”, held in hybrid format on 21-22 January 2022 in Strasbourg.

COMECE was represented by Rev. Christian Krieger, President of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). Rev. Krieger presented Churches’ united voices of concern about the future of Europe, highlighting the need to bring the EU closer to its citizens by inventing new means of democratic debate. He also addressed the current European policies on migration, stating that *“the treatment of women, children and men knocking at Europe’s door in unworthy of the EU’s commitment to human rights”*.

Ecumenical meeting with European Parliament President Roberta Metsola

On 29 June 2022, H. Em. Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ and Rev. Christian Krieger, Presidents of COMECE and CEC, were received by Roberta Metsola and Othmar Karas, respectively President and First Vice-President of the European Parliament to discuss the final report of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), as well as the ongoing war in Ukraine and the implementation of Article 17 Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU).

In the context of the follow-up to the CoFoE, the representatives of European Churches expressed their will to support concrete outcomes – as opposed to symbolic ones – and to stand ready to “further contribute to the works of the Conference, especially in the context of empowering the youth and reducing the distance between EU citizens and institutions.”

The meeting also addressed the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine, highlighting the role of Churches and religious communities in supporting the suffering local population and refugees arriving in EU countries. Given the renewed efforts to end the war, the ecumenical delegation stressed that “truth and justice are preconditions for lasting peace in Europe.”

Cardinal Hollerich and Rev. Krieger underlined the importance of maintaining constructive dialogue and interaction with the EU institutions, in line with Article 17.3 TFEU, which, according to COMECE and CEC, “should be content-based and effectively addressing key points of priority EU initiatives”. Both Cardinal Hollerich and Rev. Krieger pointed out the importance of maintaining constructive dialogue and interaction with the EU institutions, in line with Article 17 TFEU, which, according to COMECE and CEC, “should be content-based and effectively addressing key points of priority EU initiatives”. ▴



COMECE and CEC Presidents received by Roberta Metsola and Othmar Karas, President and First Vice-President of the European Parliament respectively, on 29 June 2022, to discuss the final report of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

“Responsibility and solidarity are needed in managing migration, but also generosity with migrants and refugees and their families.”

(CARD. JEAN-CLAUDE HOLLERICH S.J.)

MIGRATION AND ASYLUM

▲ As an increasing number of irregular migrants and asylum seekers started entering the EU territory, since 2015, the EU has been in “crisis mode”.

The war in Ukraine has opened a new chapter in EU refugee history by activating the alternative channel based on the Temporary Protection Directive. The influx of irregular migrants and asylum seekers in 2022 increased by 64% compared to 2021, making it the highest figure since 2016. Despite the efforts of the 2022 EU Council Presidencies, small steps were taken to have a new EU common legal framework in the migration and asylum field.

In this context, COMECE has been advocating for the full respect of the human dignity of migrants, asylum seekers and victims of trafficking at any circumstance or stage of the legal procedures, as well as the respect of the individual right to international protection.

COMECE is an active member of the Christian Group on Migration and Asylum, gathering Brussels-based advocacy Christian organisations.

Response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis



Ukrainian refugees at the Ukraine-EU border.

© <https://www.flickr.com/photos/13476480@N07>

First-ever activated on 4 March 2022, the Temporary Protection Directive offered a clear legal status and unprecedented protection across the EU to all fleeing the war in Ukraine: rights to accommodation, education, healthcare, and access to work. More than 4 million registrations for temporary protection or adequate protection under EU Member States' national law have been recorded. Meanwhile, the EU, its Member States, societies and Churches made and are making immense efforts to host and integrate Ukrainian refugees, most of whom are women and children.

The unpredictable development of the war in Ukraine does not allow for any clear future for Ukrainians either in the country or in the EU. However, a large majority of them will probably remain in the EU for some years. COMECE is a member of the Catholic Response for Ukraine (CR4U) to coordinate the efforts among Catholic institutions and better support Ukrainian refugees.

The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum



© Renovabis

Participation in the “Fair Labour Migration: An EU Perspective”, 26th Renovabis International Congress held in Munich (Germany) on 1 September 2022.

Concerning the reform of European migration and asylum rules, the European Parliament and the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU formalised their “Roadmap on the Pact on Migration and Asylum” on 7 September 2022, committing to work in view of adopting all legislative texts of the “Pact on Migration and Asylum” by February 2024.

Not seen since 2015-2016, the 100,000-mark of asylum applications lodged in EU+ countries was reached or exceeded in September, October, and November 2022, according to the EU Asylum Agency.

Further destabilisation in Africa, the Middle East (Lebanon and Iraq), Pakistan and Afghanistan will continue provoking an influx of migrants and asylum seekers turning to Europe. Tensions among countries continue about different perspectives on dealing with the migration phenomenon, including relocation.

Trafficking in Human Beings



© Shutterstock

According to Eurostat, in 2021, the number of registered victims of trafficking in human beings in the EU was 7155, an increase by 9.5 % compared with the previous year.

The European Commission introduced a proposed amendment to the Anti-Trafficking Directive in December 2022. It criminalises the use of services from victims of human trafficking by a person who is aware of this circumstances. It also adds forced marriage and illegal adoption among the forms of exploitation explicitly covered by the Anti-trafficking Directive. COMECE advocates, among other things, for enhancing preventive measures to counter human trafficking and considering the exploitation of women for surrogacy purposes as trafficking in human beings.

Working Group on Migration and Asylum

The Working Group gathers experts mandated by the EU Bishops' Conferences and entertains a regular dialogue with EU officials.

In 2022, the Working Group met on two occasions (30-31 May and 7-8 November) to discuss the situation of Ukrainian refugees and the implications derived from the ongoing war in Ukraine, as well as the EC-proposed EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and EU Social Rights' Policies towards Migrants and Refugees.

An extraordinary online session took place on 6 July 2022 to assess the tragedy in the Moroccan city of Nador, where a couple of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers tried by force to enter the Spanish city of Melilla, as a result of which some dozens of them and two policemen lost their lives.

President: Fr Manuel Barrios Prieto

Secretary: Dr José Luis Bazán



Family photo of the COMECE Working Group on Migration and Asylum on its meeting on 7-8 November 2022.

CONTRIBUTIONS

22 March

Contribution to the European Commission's public consultation on the evaluation and possible revision of the Anti-Trafficking Directive.

24 March

Statement on the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, with other members of the Christians Group on Migration and Asylum.

25 June

Statement on the Morocco-Spain border cross tragic incident.

27 June

Contribution to the Holy See's consultation on *"Building the future with migrants and refugees"*.

15 July

Publication of the Conference Report on *"Conversion in the Asylum Procedure: New Developments and Old Challenges"*.

4 October

Presentation of EU Migration and Asylum Policies during the Conference *"Fraternity and Migration in Europe: Different Perspectives and Sharing of Experiences in the light of 'Fratelli Tutti'"* held by the Archdiocese of Paris.

3 November

CCME meeting on *"Further Developing the Common European Asylum System – current opportunities and challenges"*.

10 November

Contribution to the Catholic Response for Ukraine (CR4U) Task Force, regarding the EU response to the Ukrainian Refugees Crisis.

5 December

"Die Rolle der Kommission der Bischofskonferenzen der Europäischen Gemeinschaft (COMECE) im Kampf gegen den Menschenhandel", chapter of the book *"Eine Welt - keine Sklaverei. Moderne Sklaverei weltweit"* (Herder, 2022).

EVENTS



Poster of the Conference “Fraternity and Migration in Europe: Different Perspectives and Sharing of Experiences in the light of ‘Fratelli Tutti’” held on 4 October 2022.

18 January

Intervention in the online Conference “*Conversion in the asylum procedure – new developments and old challenges*”, organised by CCME in cooperation with COMECE, CEC and EEA.

19 January

Online Conference on religious conversion during the process of asylum.

1 September

Intervention on “*Fair Labour Migration: An EU Perspective*”, 26th Renovabis International Congress held in Munich (Germany).

11 November

Meeting with EU Asylum Agency (EUAA) staff members responsible for the publication of the “*Practical Guide - Interviewing Applicants with Religion-based Asylum Claims*” held in La Valetta (Malta).

21-22 November

Experts Migration Meeting held in Cyprus and organised by the KAS office in Vienna.

8 December

Intervention of COMECE President H. Em. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ in the EPP Group Bureau Meeting “*Keeping stability in our neighbourhood: Europe and the future of migration*” held in Vienna (Austria). ▲



Meeting with EU Asylum Agency in La Valetta (Malta) on 11 November 2022.

ETHICS, RESEARCH & HEALTH

During 2022, the COMECE working fields of ethics, research and health were dominated by the manifold developments of EU policies related to the lessons to be learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating implications of the war in Ukraine.

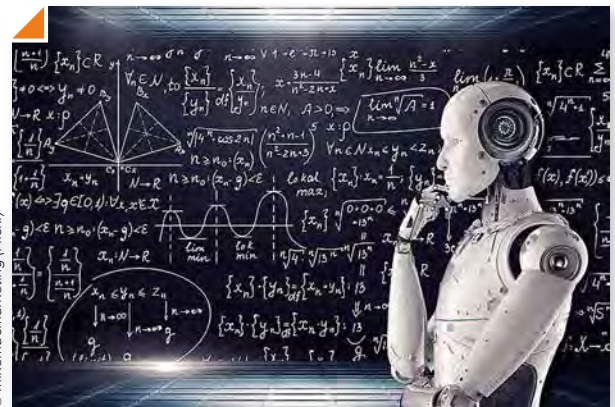
After the historic challenges posed by the pandemic, the European Union had to re-direct its action towards the dramatic implications caused by the Russian military aggression against Ukraine.

More than ever, it became evident that a more robust social ethical discourse strengthening the EU's crisis management capacity is needed. In this context, promoting human dignity and a deep sense of concrete solidarity is crucial at the heart of EU policies. These objectives were at the core of COMECE's ethical advocacy work with the institutions of the European Union.

"[...] respecting the dignity of every human person in every stage of his or her life, especially in situations of complete vulnerability [...]"

(THE PRESIDENCY OF COMECE)

DIGITAL ETHICS



Digital artwork on Artificial Intelligence.

At the end of April 2021, the European Commission proposed a legal regulation package to turn Europe into the global hub for trustworthy Artificial



COMECE Adviser Ladenburger during the conference on “Mental health of young people” held at the Permanent Representation of Nordrhein-Westfalen on 12 May 2022.

Intelligence (AI). COMECE advocated for the highest ethical standards in addressing the specific risks posed by AI systems. Therefore in 2022, COMECE focused on the negotiations of the AI Act at the European Council and the European Parliament. In this framework, COMECE suggested the following elements: a) to extend the scope of the application to private users. According to the scope of application of the draft law, unfortunately only AI used by persons in the context of their professional activities - but not in a private context - is to be regulated; b) tackling the danger that the list of high-risk AI systems is exhaustive, all systems not listed are permitted without significant restrictions; c) to regulate in the most strictly way all decisions taken by AI systems on life and death; d) AI systems must have a high level of trustworthiness. This requires an *ex-ante* evaluation through a conformity assessment by independent third parties.

ETHICS OF ENERGY

The Russian military aggression against Ukraine showed the dramatic implications of energy weaponisation. Therefore, a profound social ethical reflection on energy is urgently needed for developing a framework of references.

In this context, COMECE called for collective solidarity, inviting each member of our societies to care for one another and to pursue responsible energy consumption by:

- Ensuring accessible and affordable energy to the most affected people through temporary mitigation measures and a fair distribution of resources.
- Prioritising energy efficiency and increasing research into alternative forms of energy.
- Pursuing responsible and value-based energy partnerships and laying the foundation of a new global energy system governed by the principles of justice, solidarity, inclusive participation and sustainable development.

COMECE also called on EU policy-makers to address the current emergency, while not losing *“the sight of the long-term objectives of a just and sustainable energy transition”*.

EUROPEAN CARE STRATEGY

In September 2022, the European Commission presented the European Care Strategy intending to ensure quality, affordable and accessible care services across the European Union and to improve the situation for both care receivers and givers.

The EU Strategy is accompanied by two recommendations encouraging Member States to review the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care and access to affordable, high-quality long-term care.

In November, COMECE and FAFCE organised a conference focusing on situations of women and their important role as care and essential workers during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

COMECE has reiterated its call on the EU Member States to improve their efforts for a transition of informal care workers into formal employment relations, as well as to implement the Work-Life Balance Directive and improve the working conditions in the care sector. COMECE also highlighted the necessity of better recognition of the not-for-profit care providers in the long-term care sector.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS

© Mathieu Cugnot/European Parliament



French President Macron speaking about abortion at the EP in the context of the French EU Presidency.

In recent years, a public discussion on the sexual and reproductive health rights of women developed at the European level. In its contributions to this debate, COMECE underlined the centrality of human health: *“the right to health is a fundamental human right and constitutes an essential basis for a dignified life”*.

Regarding abortion, COMECE reiterated the crucial fact that neither the law of the European Union nor the European Convention on Human Rights provides for a right to abortion. This matter is left up to the legal systems of each EU Member State.

During the French EU Presidency, President Macron proposed to insert a right to abortion into the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. In January 2022, the Presidency of COMECE rejected such a proposal, stating that such an initiative would *“not only go against fundamental European beliefs and values but would be an unjust law, devoid of an ethical foundation and destined to be a cause of perpetual conflict among the citizens of the EU”*. COMECE also underlined that European integration should always *“foster and promote respect for different identities and avoid ideological impositions.”*

Working Group on Ethics

The Working Group is composed of experts delegated by the EU Bishops' Conferences. Theologian Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Agius (Malta) advises the group as a moderator. In 2022, the Working Group met on 11 May 2022 to discuss assisted suicide and its ethical implications.

President: Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto

Secretary: Friederike Ladenburger



Family photo of the COMECE Working Group on Ethics gathered on 14 February 2023.

© COMECE

CONTRIBUTIONS

8 February

Statement of the Standing Committee of COMECE on President Macron's proposal to include a right on abortion in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

8 June

Declaration of the Secretary General of COMECE on the EP discussions on *“Global threats to abortion rights”*.

7 July

Statement of the Secretary General of COMECE on the resolution of the European Parliament referring to the US Supreme Court decision to overturn abortion rights.

7 November

COMECE Statement on Energy emergency.

EVENTS

7-9 April

Theological-ethical Colloquium on the Common Security and Defence Policy, held in Brussels and Leuven and co-organised by COMECE and the Hamburg Institute for Theology and Peace.

11 May

Meeting of an informal working group on the use of the term gender.

12 May

Event “Mental health of young people” organised in Brussels in cooperation with the Permanent Representation of Nordrhein-Westfalen.

30 March

Meeting with the German Bishops’ Conference Working Group on Europe.

8-9 September

Presentation of the work of COMECE at the Summer University of Pro Scientia in Horn (Austria).

23-25 September

Participation in the conference of the Initiative of Christians for Europe (IXE), held in Belfast (Northern Ireland).

30 November

Event on the European Care Strategy and its implications for women, organize in Brussels by COMECE and FAFCE.

2 December

Meeting with the German Bishops’ Conference Working Group on Europe.

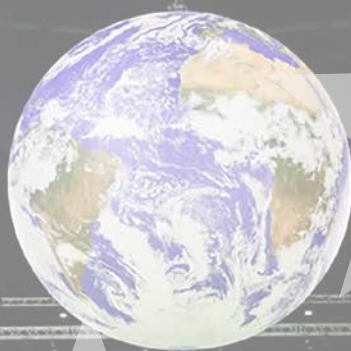
6 December

Meeting with expert group of the German Bishops’ Conference on sexual and reproductive health rights. ▲



© COMECE

Group photo of the participants of the Theological-ethical Colloquium on the Common Security and Defence Policy held at the COMECE Secretariat on 7-9 April 2022



“Good environmental policies must consider persons, families and communities more than at present. Everything is connected, a lifestyle conversion is needed.”

(CARD. JEAN-CLAUDE HOLLERICH S.J.)

ECOLOGY, ENERGY AND AGRICULTURE

▲ The war in Ukraine has had tremendous effects on the energy and agricultural sector. Some saw the drastic reduction of Russian gas imports as a reminder to accelerate the energy transition and reduce energy dependence.

At the same time, it had also increased the electricity production by coal power plants in EU Member States - after reaching an all-time high worldwide in 2021 - and increased Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) imports to compensate for the potential gas supply-demand gap, which, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA), could reach 27 billion cubic metres in 2023.

The turbulences in energy markets causing price rises to dramatic highs and their impact on inflation, reaching record highs in the Eurozone (10,6% in October), has posed a challenge for EU Member States to shield their industries and populations from unaffordable bills. The farming sector has furthermore been suffering from the lack of fertilizers.

The summer heats and droughts throughout Europe, with their simultaneous impact upon vulnerable people, the environment, farming, and the production of electricity (predominantly nuclear and hydropower plants), have shown us that “everything is connected”.

ECOLOGY AND SUSTAINABILITY



H.Em. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of His Holiness, during the UN Climate Change Conference COP27 held in Sharm el-Sheikh (Egypt) on 8 November 2022.

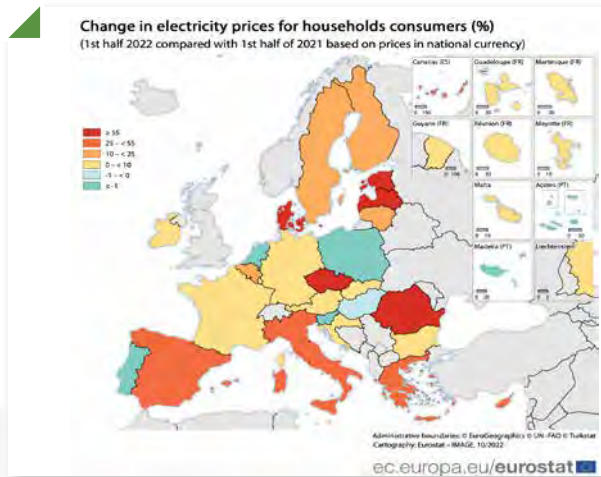
In preparation for the UN Climate Change Conference 2022 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, COMECE participated in the Holy See Working Group meeting held in October 2022 to discuss some of the issues to address at the conference.

Considering the regularity of severe natural disasters around the globe, it is increasingly becoming clear that climate change has already had dramatic consequences, especially for the poor and the marginalised.

In the discussion, a consensus emerged: the focus of the Catholic contribution should not only be laid upon reducing emissions but also upon resilience, consisting of mitigation, adaptation and the ecological conversion Pope Francis often speaks about.

During the Holy See Working Group, COMECE suggested urging the European Union and other economically advantaged international actors to seriously tackle the issue of “Loss and Damage”. Our responsibility is to support developing countries that have already been affected by climate change, not only financially but also through providing technology and infrastructure.

ENERGY CRISIS



Change in electricity prices for European households consumers expressed in percentages.

In response to the disruptions in the energy market, the European Commission adopted the REPowerEU plan in May 2022 as the framework by which the EU aims to end dependence on Russian fossil fuels and accelerate the green transition. Several other measures were taken to tackle the issues of high energy prices and potential gas shortages, such as regulations on gas reduction and storage, or what is commonly called the “gas price cap”.

In this context, COMECE released a statement in November 2022 to call for collective solidarity. In particular, the Secretariat called on EU decision-makers to ensure accessible and affordable energy, to prioritise energy efficiency and increase research, and

to pursue responsible energy partnerships. Attention was also drawn to the agri-food sector suffering from high energy prices and the scarcity of fertilisers: “We cannot risk a disruption in supply and must ensure continuity of production cycles and our ability to provide basic food for all at affordable prices.”



ELSiA

The European Laudato Si' Alliance (ELSiA) is a network of Catholic organisations committed to bringing the prophetic message of the Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' to life in Europe. ELSiA members include COMECE, Caritas Europa, CIDSE, Don Bosco International, the Jesuit European Social Centre, Justice and Peace Europe and the Laudato Si' Movement.

In 2022 ELSiA has organised innovative initiatives and workshops on themes including intergenerational ecological justice, COP27, and the EU Fit for 55 package. ELSiA has also held the second eco-spirituality workshop in collaboration with the community of Taizé.

All these initiatives were designed to share the discernment process towards ecological conversion. They showcased examples of what this conversion looks like in practice, with testimonies from inspiring and compassionate individuals and communities.

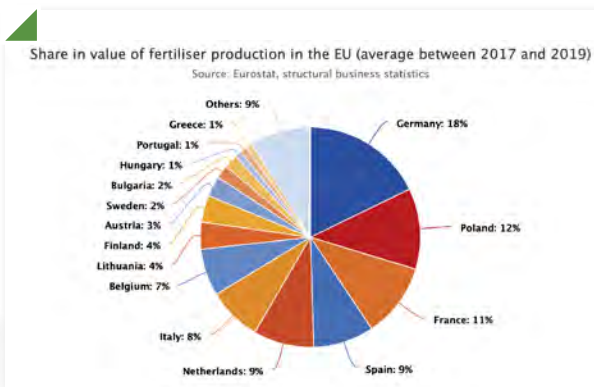
In September 2022, the Steering Group of ELSiA gathered in the Drongen Abbey (Belgium) for two days of discernment and prayer. They renewed their commitment to sharing the ecological conversion journey with creativity, joy, and hope, celebrating and honouring Creation.

ELSiA Coordinator: Cinzia Verzeletti



ELSiA Steering Group during a retreat in Drongen (Belgium) on 14-15 September 2022.

CONTRIBUTIONS



Share in value of fertilizer production in the EU.

EVENTS

17 May

5th European Laudato Si' Reflection Day. The event was organised by ELSiA.

8 September

Webinar on the "Fit for 55" Package to implement the Green Deal. The event was organised by ELSiA in the context of the Season of Creation 2022.

17 October

COMECE participates in the Holy See Working Group for COP27. ▀

7 November

Statement of the COMECE Secretariat on the energy crisis *"Energy emergency: COMECE is calling for solidarity ahead of the winter"*.

***"It is vital that
fundamental human rights are
not violated but promoted."***

(POPE FRANCIS)

LEGAL AFFAIRS & FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

▲ COMECE strives to ground its contributions to justice and fundamental rights policies and legal proposals on the concern for the protection of the dignity of each person. COMECE also analyses EU initiatives in this field with an eye to their possible implications for the daily life of the Catholic Church. The role of religion in the public square is crucial and, therefore, particularly promoted in this area of work. These three reference points marked the activities of COMECE concerning Justice and Fundamental Rights.

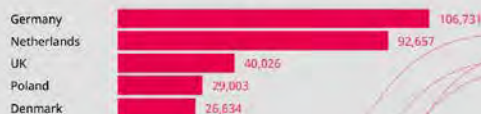
The importance of the religious element in the European landscape emerged in multiple actions and discussions - e.g. on religious symbols at the workplace, as well as on freedom of religion and ritual slaughter of animals.

EU legislation is the constant framework for the legal work of COMECE, including when dealing with internal matters, for instance, internal data protection rules and practices, and the assessment of the "Vos Estis Lux Mundi" *motu proprio* on the fight against child sexual abuse in the Church.

Child protection online has become an even more vital point of attention, following up to the recent proposal of the European Commission aimed at eradicating this phenomenon.

DATA PROTECTION

Total number of personal data breach notifications
between 25 May 2018 and 27 January 2022 inclusive



Number of personal data breach notifications
between May 2018 and January 2022.

Protecting personal data remains a core priority in the COMECE work programme. The annual meeting of Bishops' Conferences experts in this field has become a consolidated feature. During its 4th edition, exchanges were devoted to data protection principles - in particular: data minimisation, storage limitation and accountability. Experts also focused on the key supporting role of Data Protection Officers (DPOs) in Church structures and continued their reflection on the interaction between Canon Law and the GDPR.

COMECE also submitted a contribution to the European Data Protection Board providing a Church perspective on the right of access.

Finally, the Secretariat produced a reviewed Guidance to the member Bishops' Conferences to assist them in facing GDPR-related challenges.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION INSIDE THE EU



ProSPeReS Consortium WP3 Workshop on “Protecting places of worship pre, during and after a terrorist attack”, held in The Hague (The Netherlands) on 24 October 2022.

COMECE brings substantial inputs in all EU legislative proposals and initiatives that may affect the fundamental right to freedom of religion.

In October, COMECE took part in a High-level conference organised by the European Commission on the ritual slaughter of animals and, more generally, on freedom of religion in the European Union. In this context, COMECE restated that fundamental rights belonging to persons and communities cannot be placed on the same level as the welfare of animals. COMECE also insisted on the importance of religious literacy within public authorities and underlined that religion cannot be considered something that may be “*left outside the door*” be it at the workplace or more generally in the public space.

COMECE continued to highlight the close link between EU initiatives on protecting places of worship and exercising freedom of religion. In this sense, the Secretariat contributed to an expert workshop organised by the EU-funded ‘ProSPeReS’ Consortium, highlighting the need to preserve the open, accessible and welcoming nature of places of worship when implementing protective measures and acknowledging that the COVID-19 pandemic enhanced security culture and awareness within the Church.

NON-PROFIT LAW



Meeting of the COMECE Legal Affairs Commission, held in Brussels on 29-30 September 2022.

In the context of the legislative proposal on non-profit organisations and associations, to be published by the European Commission by the summer of 2023, COMECE and its Legal Affairs Commission put forward some arguments and suggestions to the European Commission. They expressed their support for the goal of enhancing the possibilities of cross-border activities and cooperation for such entities, which are instrumental in ensuring vital and vibrant democracies and societies all over the Union and in contributing to their cohesion.

COMECE underlined that any legal provision concerning the exclusion of organisations with a primarily religious aim should reflect Article 17.1 TFEU (with reference to ‘Churches and religious associations or communities’). At the same time, these provisions should not limit the possibility of operating across borders for organisations whose values and aims are inspired by a religious belief - e.g. faith-based, charitable non-profit organisations.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND EVENTS

11 March

Contribution to the European Data Protection Board public consultation on “*Guidelines 01/2022 on data subject rights - Right of access*”.

24 March

Observations and comments concerning the *Motu Proprio* “*Vos estis lux mundi*” on new procedural norms to combat sexual abuse in the Church.

19 May

4th annual meeting of Data protection Experts of EU Bishops' Conferences.

20 October

Contribution to the High-level European Commission Conference *"Freedom of religion with regard to ritual slaughter"*.

24 October

Contribution to the ProSPeReS Consortium WP3 Workshop on *"Protecting places of worship pre, during and after a terrorist attack"*, held in The Hague (The Netherlands).

26 October

Contribution to the European Commission public consultation on *"Single market – Proposal for a legislative initiative on cross-border activities of association"*.

28 November

"The General Data Protection Regulation and the Catholic Church in the EU – Guidance for the COMECE Bishops' Conferences" (internal). ▴

Legal Affairs Commission

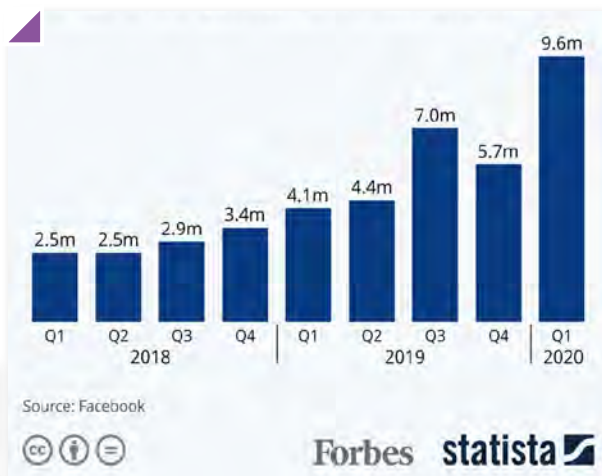
The COMECE Legal Affairs Commission gathers legal experts mandated by the EU Bishops' Conferences and entertains a regular dialogue with EU officials. During 2022, this Commission was convened twice. On 17-18 February 2022 it focused on hate crimes and hate speech, the EU accession to the European Convention of Human Rights, freedom of movement and parenthood, and the resolution on non-profit law of the European Parliament. On 29-30 September 2022 the members of the Legal Affairs Commission exchanged on protection of children online, primacy of EU law, recognition of parenthood between Member States and again on legislation concerning non-profit organisations and associations, in this case in dialogue with the European Commission. Data protection and freedom of religion inside the EU are permanent features of the agenda of the Legal Affairs Commission.

President: H.E. Mgr. Theodorus C.M. Hoogenboom

Secretary: Alessandro Calcagno



Screenshot of the online meeting of Legal Affairs Commission of COMECE, held on 17-18 February 2022.



Amount of hate speech content removed by Facebook in the period 2018-2020.

Programme
MEETING OF THE
COMECE SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION
Monday 5 December 2022
Brussels, 1050 Brussels

SOCIAL & ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

“In the face of the many changes we are witnessing at the international level, we must ensure “the development of a global community of fraternity based on the practice of social friendship on the part of peoples and nations.”

(POPE FRANCIS)

▲ The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic recovery after months of health restrictions put pressure on commodity prices. Moreover, Russia's invasion of Ukraine worsened the socioeconomic situation of EU Member States.

The world has experienced pressure on energy prices, with an unprecedented surge in gas prices. Finally, the climate uncertainties and the war in Ukraine have also pushed up food prices. As a result, households and companies suffer the effects

of this shock through a drop in their purchasing power or an increase in production costs.

The drastic rise in the inflation rate in Europe to over 10% in 2022, for the first time since the creation of the eurozone, has brought the question of a dignified wage to the fore. At the same time, social movements have been growing to combat rising prices.

SOARING ENERGY PRICES: WILL PEOPLE BE ABLE TO AFFORD HEATING THIS WINTER?

In the framework of the Spring meeting of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission, academics, Church delegates and high-level EU officials met together to exchange on the social, climate and sovereignty challenges posed by the energy crisis.

Given the current challenging context in which the energy transition is taking place, and considering the developments following the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the discussion was centred around the latest evolutions in the EU energy policy, with a particular focus on its impact on people and the ecological transition.



H.E. Mgr. Antoine Hérouard, President of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission, together with Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, during a meeting in the Taizé Community (France) on 27 August 2022.

Following up, and in light of the approaching winter, COMECE released in November 2022 a statement calling for collective solidarity and inviting each member of our societies to care for one another and to pursue responsible energy consumption. Guided by Catholic Social Teaching, the statement offers EU decision-makers principles for orientation towards accessible and affordable energy, energy efficiency and justice and peace.

THE SOCIAL ECONOMY, SOURCE OF “RELATIONAL WEALTH”



Screenshot of the first session of the COMECE ad-hoc Working Group on the Social Economy, held online on 19 September 2022.

As part of the Action Plan on the Social Economy (2021), the European Commission announced a Council Recommendation on defining the framework conditions of the Social Economy and launched a public consultation.

Following a discussion between the COMECE Social Affairs Commission and key EU stakeholders, our Secretariat established an *ad-hoc* Working Group to elaborate on a contribution to such a consultation.

Presided by H.E. Mgr. Antoine Hérouard, this Working Group was composed of academics, entrepreneurs and Church representatives - including some from the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (Holy See). Elena Lasida, Professor of “Solidarity economy” at the Catholic Institute in Paris, directed the elaboration process of the contribution. The reflection paper resulting from this process highlighted the links between principles of the Catholic Social Teaching and the Social Economy, as well as exploring the idea of “relational wealth” and offering concrete proposals to support the development of the social economy.

As a follow-up and to strengthen its advocacy work on this issue with the EU institutions, COMECE will organise an event in the European Parliament (February 2023) before the Commission adopts its recommendation.

TACKLING POVERTY WITH THE MINIMUM INCOME?



Minimum wages in the EU Member States.

On 28 September 2022, the European Commission called on Member States to modernise their minimum income schemes and proposed a Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income and ensuring active inclusion. The aim is to help achieve the 2030 social targets to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or exclusion by at least 15 million people - as set in the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The minimum income is a toll already existing in some Member States; however, its adequacy, reach, and effectiveness vary significantly between countries.

On 5 December 2022, the Social Affairs Commission of COMECE explored this topic from the perspective of the Catholic Church, looking at the concrete recommendations formulated as part of the proposal and discussing them with the European Commission, the Czech EU Presidency and trade unions. This discussion took place timely before the adoption of the Recommendation by the Council on 8 December 2022.



THE EUROPEAN SUNDAY ALLIANCE

The European Sunday Alliance is a network of over 100 national Sunday Alliances, trade unions, civil society organisations and religious communities across Europe, all committed to putting the establishment of a European weekly common day of rest for workers as a priority on the EU social policy agenda. By tradition, this day would be Sunday in Europe, as enshrined in Art. 2 of the European Social Charter.

The Steering Committee of the Alliance is composed of several Brussels-based organisations and serves as a *de-facto* Secretariat. In 2022, the sponsor of the Alliance was MEP Dennis Radtke (EPP, DE).

In 2021, the Alliance focused on the Right to disconnect from work and digital devices after working hours and the benefits of a weekly synchronised period of rest for a family-work balance. In 2022, the European Sunday Alliance released a declaration calling on EU political leaders to prioritise establishing a weekly common day of rest for workers. In 2023, the Alliance will focus on the issue of loneliness and mental health.

Social Affairs Commission

The Commission monitors EU social and economic policies, prepares statements and contributions, and organises activities related to this field. Under the chairmanship of Mgr. Antoine Hérouard (France), the Commission met on two occasions (in June and December) to exchange, among the others, on the following topics: social economy, social, climate and geopolitical perspective of the energy crisis, minimum income and disability employment package.

President: Mgr. Antoine Hérouard

Secretary: Alix de Wasseige



Family photo of the members of the COMECE Social Affairs Commission, held in Brussels on 5 December 2022.

FR. MANUEL BARRIOS

Secretary General of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE)
on the annual European Day for a Work-Free Sunday (3 March 2022)



A synchronized common day of rest enables people to spend time with their family and friends, to care for others, especially the most vulnerable, to play together with their children and friends, to enjoy contact with nature and to nourish their cultural and spiritual life and pursue other interests and hobbies. Today, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the increasingly blurring of work-life balance, and the accelerating of an 'always-on culture', it is essential more than ever to have a clear and common day of rest.



Example of an ESA Social Media campaign on the European Day for a Work-Free Sunday.

CONTRIBUTIONS

3 March

European Sunday Alliance Joint Statement on the European Day for a Work Free-Sunday.

September

COMECE's answer to the European Commission's Consultation on defining the framework conditions of the Social Economy.

November

Statement *"Energy emergency: COMECE is calling for solidarity ahead of the winter"*.



Marie-Louise Coleiro, Former President of the Republic of Malta and expert delegated by the Maltese Bishops' Conference to the COMECE Social Affairs Commission, during a meeting in June 2022.

EVENTS

3 March

European Sunday Alliance's media campaign on the importance of a Work-Free Sunday.

17-20 March

European Catholic Social Days, organised by COMECE, CCEE and Slovak Bishops' Conference in Bratislava (Slovakia).

12 May

European Catholic Youth Forum for Social Engagement held at the European Parliament.

19 September

COMECE Ad-hoc Working Group on the Social Economy.

22-24 September

"Economy of Francesco", held in Assisi (Italy).

30 September

First meeting of the CSPO, informal group constituted by Christian Social Policy Officers sharing good practices and perspectives for the future.

3 October

Second COMECE *ad-hoc* Working Group on the Social Economy.

30 November

COMECE-FAFCE Conference on the 'European Care Strategy' and challenges faced by women during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. ▲


 UKRAINE

“The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have prompted the European Union to realise how crucial its role is to offer a renewed strategic vision for stability, justice and peace to the European continent and the world.”

(MGR. RIMANTAS NORVILA)

EU EXTERNAL ACTION

▲ The war in Ukraine has not only shaken up the European and global security architecture. Still, it has also shattered the previous convictions about a firm grounding of a culture of peace on the European continent. The horrific human suffering caused by this “madness of war” is a source of deep sadness and concern for the Church.

Moreover, the war in Ukraine and its consequences negatively affect the populations in Europe and the rest of the globe. Our solidarity is also required with regard to poorer nations in the world suffering from increased levels of food insecurity and extreme poverty resulting from high commodity prices due to the ripple effects of this violent conflict. At the same time, we must maintain sight of other conflicts and crises in our neighbourhood and globally. On the other hand, encouraging signs in the EU’s External Action over the past months have been the renewal of the partnership with Africa and a new impulse for the European Enlargement Policy.

THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND PERSPECTIVES FOR PEACE



A high-level delegation of religious leaders from Ukraine visited the Secretariat of COMECE on Wednesday 15 June 2022.

The Bishops of the European Union have repeatedly expressed their *“deep sadness at the horrific human suffering inflicted on our brothers and sisters in Ukraine by the brutal military aggression initiated by the Russian authorities”*. During their 2022 Autumn Plenary Assembly, they reiterated a heartfelt appeal *“to the aggressors, immediately to suspend the hostilities, and to all parties to open themselves up to the negotiation of ‘serious proposals’ for a just peace, to work towards a solution to the conflict, which respects international law and the territorial integrity of Ukraine”*.

Besides numerous moments of prayer and peace calls echoing the appeals of Pope Francis and the Holy See, COMECE has maintained regular contacts with local Churches in Ukraine and brought their concerns to the attention of EU institutions. In June 2022, COMECE hosted a high-level inter-religious delegation from Ukraine, exchanging with EU representatives perspectives for peace in their war-torn country and ways to support the Ukrainian population. Ahead of the June 2022 European Council, COMECE offered EU decision-makers reflections and policy recommendations on how to *“renew Europe’s vocation to promote peace”* in this challenging global context.

Perspectives for peace in Ukraine and beyond were also discussed by EU Military Ordinaries who gathered at COMECE for their biennial meeting and highlighted the need for a comprehensive European peace strategy and a renewed strategic vision for stability, justice and peace on the European continent and in the world.

A NEW MOMENTUM FOR EU ENLARGEMENT POLICY

In view of the strategic importance of EU integration for stability, prosperity and peace on the European continent, COMECE has repeatedly called on the EU and its Member States to renew their commitment to a credible EU enlargement process with all European countries that have submitted their application for future membership.

COMECE also welcomed the granting of candidate status to Ukraine, Moldova, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, and expressed congratulations on the opening of EU accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, whose people *“have long awaited this moment with hope and faith”*.

RENEWED EU PARTNERSHIP WITH AFRICA



H. Em. Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel, Head of the Ethiopian Catholic Church, during his visit to COMECE on 22 February 2022.

Ahead of the 6th Summit meeting between the political leaders of the European Union and the African Union held in February 2022 in Brussels, COMECE re-proposed to the decision-makers of the two continents the reflections and recommendations elaborated jointly with the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM).

EU and African Bishops called for a people-centred, just and responsible partnership between the two regions. In this context, COMECE hosted an online dialogue meeting with representatives of other faith communities in Europe and Africa on how the newly established EU Global Gateway investment initiative could help promote the integral development of local communities and thus contribute to an EU-AU partnership of equals.



A group of young people from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership regions, meet with COMECE to exchange about the Catholic Church's perspective on EU enlargement and peace.

In February, COMECE received H. Em. Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel, Head of the Ethiopian Catholic Church, who drew attention to the role of Churches in fostering the ongoing process of peacebuilding and reconciliation in Ethiopia.

TOWARDS A MANDATORY EU DUE DILIGENCE LEGISLATION



H.E. Mgr. Vicente Ferreira (Brasil) together with members of an indigenous community affected by harmful mining activities.

The European Commission published in February 2022 a proposal for a mandatory EU legislation requiring companies to conduct human rights and environmental due diligence in their global value chains. The following month, COMECE, together with CIDSE and Iglesias y Minería, hosted a public event to draw the attention of European legislators to the need to prevent harmful business actions and to offer victims of corporate abuse effective avenues for remedy.

The event featured Church and community leaders from various Latin American countries who have been negatively affected by the actions of the mining and extractive industry. As part of their official visit to Brussels, they held several encounters with EU officials and local Church representatives to speak about their experience and to plead for a strong EU due diligence law.

Commission on the EU External Action

The Commission monitors and prepares statements, contributions and other activities to the EU policy and public debates on areas of EU's External Action, such as Security & Defence, Sustainable Development, Neighbourhood, Human Rights and Trade.

Under the chairmanship of H.E. Mgr. Rimantas Norvila (Lithuania), the COMECE Commission on EU External Relations, gathered on 12 May and 16 November 2022 and discussed the war in Ukraine and its implications for the EU's External Action with EU and Church representatives.

The Commission also exchanged perspectives with EU officials on the future of the EU Enlargement policy, the Common Security and Defence Policy, and the multifaceted crises facing Lebanon and its population.

President: Mgr. Rimantas Norvila

Secretary: Marek Mišák



Family photo of the Commission on the EU External Action, held on 12 May 2022.



Military Bishops and Ordinaries from EU Member States were gathered by COMECE to exchange on the current and emerging challenges for the Common Security and Defence policy, especially in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The meeting featured the participation of Lt. Gen. Bart Laurent, Director for Operations, EU Military Staff. The meeting was held in Brussels on 1st June 2022.

CONTRIBUTIONS

26 January

Statement of the President of COMECE on the current situation in Ukraine.

21 February

COMECE Statement on welcoming EU financial assistance to Ukraine.

24 February

Cardinal Hollerich's Statement on the situation in Ukraine and in Europe.

2 March

Prayer for peace in Ukraine and in Europe offered by the President of COMECE, Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ.

10 March

COMECE President's Appeal to Moscow Patriarch Kirill: *"Intercede with Russia to stop the war in Ukraine"*.

19 March

Joint Statement of the Presidents of COMECE, CCEE and the Slovak Bishops' Conference on the *"Consecration and entrustment of Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary"*.

8 April

Joint Easter Message for peace and reconciliation offered by the Presidents of COMECE and CEC.

13 April

Joint letter of COMECE and CEC Presidents to the Heads of State of Russia and Ukraine, calling for an Easter ceasefire in Ukraine.

9 May

Statement of Cardinal Hollerich on Europe Day: *"Peace in Ukraine and stronger citizens' participation"*.

17 June

Statement prepared by the COMECE Commission on EU External Relations: *"Europe, renew your vocation to promote peace"*.

14 October

A heartfelt Appeal of COMECE Bishops for peace in Ukraine and in the whole of Europe.

16 November

Statement prepared by the COMECE Commission on EU External Relations: *"What else must happen so that finally an end is put to this madness of war?"*

16 December

A joint COMECE-CEC Christmas message for peace in Ukraine and beyond.

EVENTS

11 February

Intervention at the Conference held in Rome: *“Armi nucleari in progetti di pace: una proposta europea per il disarm”*. The event was organised by Comitato per una Civiltà dell’amore.

26 March

Public event *“But let justice roll-on like a river”*, on the need for a mandatory EU due diligence legislation. The event was co-organised by COMECE, CIDSE and Iglesias y Minería.

7-9 April

Theological-ethical Colloquium on the Common Security and Defence Policy, held in Brussels and Leuven and co-organised by COMECE and the Hamburg Institute for Theology and Peace.

31 May

Intervention at the conference “Il Disarmo Nucleare: Opportunità di Pace e Lavoro per l’Europa e per il Mondo”, held in Brussels by Comitato per una Civiltà dell’amore.

1 June

Meeting of EU Military Ordinaries and experts of the Military Ordinariates in Brussels.

15 June

Visit of a high-level delegation of religious leaders from Ukraine.

28 June

Exchange with students from the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe on the future of the EU Enlargement policy.

23-24 September

Theological-ethical Colloquium on the Common Security and Defence Policy, held in Rome and organised by Hamburg Institute for Theology and Peace.

21-22 October

International Krakow Conference on the role of Christians in the process of European integration: *“War in Europe – What the European Union will be like?”*. The event was co-organised by COMECE, the Tadeusz Pieronek Foundation, the Robert Schuman Foundation, the European People’s Party Group in the European Parliament and the Polish Delegation in the EPP in the European Parliament.

29 November

Intervention at the Cologne Conference: *„Der Krieg gegen die Ukraine und seine Folgen für die europäische Sicherheit”*. The event was organised by Renovabis and Katholisches Bildungswerk Köln. ▲



COMECE participating in a panel debate at the International Krakow Conference entitled: *“War in Europe – What the European Union will be like?”* in October 2022.

EDUCATION & CULTURE

“Only by including entire communities in the educational process will learners be respected in their dignity and find their vocation in life.”

(FR. MANUEL BARRIOS PRIETO)

▲ In 2022, the areas of Culture and Education in the EU witnessed a slow, yet unaccomplished, come back to normality. In the EU context, actions on educational and cultural cooperation between Member States were directed at supporting these two sectors and advancing the current programmes and initiatives in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Education and Training, actions towards the targets of the European Education Area show mixed results. On the one hand, early school leaving continues to decline and early childhood education has steadily increased. On the other, underachievement in basic skills is stagnating, and vast divides between Member States make the EU stand fragmented and increase social inequality.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine had a devastating impact on the cultural relations between the EU and Russia, as well as on the implementation of cultural exchanges, the deepening of artistic collaboration and the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy.

The year 2022 also saw the approval of the EU Working Plan for Culture 2023-2026, aiming to empower the cultural and creative sectors, enhance cultural participation and its role in society, and make cultural heritage more resilient and effective in tackling climate change.

INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL RELATIONS AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH



Poster of the COMECE initiative “Christian ARTworks month by month”.

The cultural dimension of EU external relations plays a fundamental role in maintaining peace and social cohesion and establishing meaningful cooperation with third countries. The importance of the role of religious actors and, in particular, Churches in fostering culture and cultural heritage was stressed by COMECE while monitoring the European Parliament’s *Report on the Implementation of the European Agenda for Culture and the EU strategy for international cultural relations*.

Similarly, the approved Council's *Working Plan for Culture 2023-2026* focused on strengthening the cultural and creative sectors, enhancing participation and unleashing their power in the green transition.

In this context, COMECE engaged with the EU stakeholders to highlight the importance of cultural dialogue with actors from different religions and ethnicities and the necessity of involving religious and cultural stakeholders in conflict analyses and cultural diplomacy.

The Secretariat also continued to promote European Christian heritage with its social media campaign, stressing the European dimension of tangible and intangible Christian artworks within the EU Bishops' Conferences.

SKILLS, TRAINING AND DIGITAL EDUCATION



Percentage of people aged 16-74 with at least basic overall digital skills in Europe in 2021.

Learning from the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalisation of education and training took off in 2022, with EU policies trying to implement the lessons learnt within the framework of the twin green and digital transitions.

COMECE submitted its contribution to the European Commission's call for evidence on the provision of digital skills, stressing the importance of teachers' digital competencies, the difficulties of digital learning for socio-economically disadvantaged families and learners, and the necessity for a balance between digital learning and face-to-face teaching. Digital

skills were also addressed as part of a contribution of COMECE, elaborated with the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE) and Don Bosco International, on the Commission's proposal for the 2023 European Year of Skills.

PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES OF THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA



As part of its work on Education, COMECE published a contribution to the European Education Area, calling on the EU and its Member States to implement integral education in their policies. Drafted by the COMECE Working Group on Culture and Education, the document addresses the six dimensions of the European Education Area. It delves into the anthropology of the human person and focuses on the need for integral education, as stressed by Pope Francis in his *Global Compact on Education*.

The paper addresses the situation of education in the EU, mentioning the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the learning paths of pupils and students, as well as the socio-economic and psychological implications of the health crisis. Among the recommendations to EU policymakers, COMECE proposed to reinforce cooperation between the EU and third countries' universities for meaningful dialogue and fraternity, to enhance the support for teachers in their mission of

accompanying learners and to promote innovation in teaching practices with a balanced approach between digital and in-person teaching methods.

REUSE AND RENOVATION OF CHURCHES AND THE NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS

© European Commission



Logo of the EU initiative "A New European Bauhaus".

Created to foster a cultural movement underpinning the European Green Deal, the Commission's initiative *New European Bauhaus* is, according to the latest European Parliament's resolution, failing to be inclusive enough and unable to reach all EU countries and interested parties. The European Parliament highlighted that the initiative should be people-oriented, avoid any elitist approach, and enhance citizens' and communities' consultation and participation.

COMECE has actively worked on the *New European Bauhaus*, setting up the first two informal meetings of the Platform on the renovation and reuse of churches. The pilot meeting in July saw the participation of experts from the EU Bishops' Conferences, organisations representatives and academics working in religious and cultural heritage.

In October, participants entered into dialogue with the European Commission, highlighting the challenges of Bishops' Conferences in renovating and repurposing church buildings and the importance of such issues for the *New European Bauhaus*.

© LStockStudio/Shutterstock



Young students going to school.

CONTRIBUTIONS

31 August

Contribution to the European Education Area by the COMECE Working Group on Culture and Education.

16 September

COMECE response to European Commission call for evidence on the provision of digital skills.

14 December

Contribution to the European Commission's consultation on the European Year of Skills.2023.

EVENTS

14 July

Annual Encounter of the Service of the European Churches for International Students, Braga (online participation).

22 October

General Assembly of the European Federation of Catholic Universities, Tirana. ▲

Working Group on Culture and Education

The Working Group was established in December 2020 and is composed of the experts delegated by the EU Bishops' Conferences. In 2022, the Working Group met twice (16-17 June and 24 November) to exchange, among others, on the contribution of the Catholic Church to shape a culture of peace and dialogue in Europe, as well as on the post-COVID 19 developments in digital education.

President: Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto

Secretary: Emilio Dogliani



Screenshot of a session of the COMECE Working Group on Culture and Education held online on 16-17 June 2022.

© ACN

“Religious freedom, which cannot be reduced simply to freedom of worship, is one of the minimum requisites for a dignified way of life.”

(POPE FRANCIS)

INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

▲ Religious freedom is a litmus test for all human rights. Under the ICCPR, the right to religious freedom is non-derogable, even during public emergencies or war. However, religious freedom is facing new challenges in the world.

The situation of specific religious communities in third countries has been aggravated: e.g., the religious persecution in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, the systematic killing of Christians in Nigeria, the death penalty imposed in Pakistan under its blasphemy legislation, the persecution of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, or the jihadist attacks

against the Catholic Church and other religious communities in Burkina Faso, Mali, Mozambique and Cameroon. In addition, the deterioration of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion in some Western countries outside the EU is a worrying trend that undermines the harmony and integrity of the human rights ecosystem.

Freedom of religion enhances many other fundamental rights and freedoms. Therefore, the EU should protect and promote this cornerstone freedom in its external policies, including development and cooperation aid.

Aid to the Church in
ACN - INTERNA

© UNESCO



The holy cross is being placed on the top of the dome of the Church of Notre-Dame de l'Heure in Mosul (Iraq). Previously destroyed by ISIS terrorists, the church is under reconstruction.

In its advocacy work, COMECE regularly cooperates with other Catholic and non-Catholic stakeholders advocating for the full respect of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion outside the EU. In its dialogue with EU officials, COMECE denounces the violations of religious freedom and contributes with its proposals for the inclusion of religious freedom in the agenda of EU institutions.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: EU GUIDELINES AND EU SPECIAL ENVOY



© Dany Coghe

Frans van Daele, appointed EU Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the EU on 7 December 2022.

Despite the adoption of the EU Guidelines on promoting and protecting freedom of religion or belief in 2013, they remain either unknown by a large part of the EEAS representatives or unapplied.

The appointment by the European Commission of Frans van Daele as the new EU Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the EU on 7 December 2022 is a positive step. However, contrary to the request of the European Parliament, its mandate and resources remain too limited. COMECE continues demanding an appropriate allocation of human and financial resources for this mechanism. The new EU Special Envoy is attached to the office of EC Vice-President Margaritis Schinas, who is in charge of leading the dialogue with Churches, religious associations or communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations. The mandate of the EU Special Envoy includes *“supporting intercultural and interreligious dialogue, including between representatives of different faiths and the setting up of joint initiatives and on the prevention of extremism*

on grounds of religion or belief in third countries. In cooperation with authorities from third countries, he will promote religious diversity and tolerance within educational programmes and curricula.”



© EPP

COMECE General Secretary General Fr. Manuel Barrios Prieto addressing the participants of the EPP Group Annual Intercultural Dialogue with Churches and Religious Institutions, as well as remembering former Apostolic Nuncio to the EU, Mgr. Aldo Giordano. The meeting was held in Vienna on 9 December 2022.

FROM PAKISTAN TO SYRIA AND IRAQ: HOW TO USE EU EXTERNAL POLICIES' TOOLS

COMECE advocates for the preservation, collection and use of evidence to prosecute perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes against religious minorities in countries such as Syria and Iraq. Despite the humanitarian exception, EU sanctions still disproportionately impact religious minorities in Syria. The EU should look for opening channels to allow humanitarian actors to assist the population, including the reconstruction of schools and hospitals.

The weaponisation of women belonging to religious minorities, including sexual abuse and slavery, forced conversion and marriage, continues in some countries. The ongoing GSP+ EU-Pakistan negotiations should lead to a clear improvement on the ground of the situation of religious communities in Pakistan before privileged access to EU markets is granted.

In Lebanon, the Catholic Church is a relevant health and education provider that, with the support of the EU, could play a role in alleviating the distress of the impoverished local population. Certain misleading and damaging narratives neglect or diminish the relevance of the religious factor in certain situations: e.g., considering climate change as “the” reason for

killing Christians in Nigeria. Not less, it is of utmost importance to recall the positive role that Churches and religious communities play in overcoming radicalisation and enhancing social peace and development.

CONTRIBUTIONS

3 May

Statement ahead of the European Parliament motion for resolution on the persecution of minorities on the grounds of belief or religion.

1 June

Contribution to the discussion with the UN Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief in a meeting at the EEAS highlighting the protection of the right to conscientious objection, as well as anti-Christian hatred.

8 June

Declaration of the General Secretary of COMECE on the European Parliament discussion on *“Global threats to abortion rights”*.

1 December

Briefing to the European Commission (DG Trade) about religious freedom in Pakistan in view of the ongoing EU-Pakistan negotiations on GSP+ status renewal of the later.

EVENTS

9 February

Contribution to the Roundtable at the Abat Oliba University on the ACN Religious Freedom Report.

7 June

Intervention at the Working Breakfast of the EPP Service on intercultural and interreligious dialogue on *“Empowerment of vulnerable Christian communities in the world”* held at the European Parliament.

11 October

Working Breakfast with H.E. Mgr. Anagbe, Bishop of Makurdi (Nigeria). Meeting with MEP Othmar Karas, First Vice-President of the European Parliament. These two events were organised by COMECE and Aid to the Church in Need.

25 October

Working Breakfast with H.E. Mgr. Mark Kadima of Bungoma (Kenya). The event was organised by COMECE and Aid to the Church in Need.

9 November

Meeting on media relations with stakeholders, organised by the EPP Group Unit on Intercultural and Inter-religious Dialogue at the European Parliament.

9 December

EPP Group Annual Intercultural Dialogue with Churches and Religious Institutions, Vienna (Austria). ▲



COMECE-ACN meeting with H.E. Mgr. Anagbe (Nigeria) and MEP Othmar Karas, First Vice-President of the European Parliament.

YOUTH POLICIES

▲ The European Year of Youth aimed to direct the attention of EU stakeholders to young generations and set up various initiatives at institutional and national level, emphasizing youth's contribution for a more forward-looking European project.

The Year's initiatives were manifold: from topical youth policy dialogues with EU Commissioners to more than 12000 initiatives in 72 countries (in the EU and beyond), whose inputs were gathered on the dedicated digital public platform.

In September 2022, the European Parliament launched its Youth Hub, in order to engage with young people and spur discussion about their needs and ideas. However, the Year failed to reach out to many young people through its efforts on communication. Youth organisations called for structured mechanisms that can enhance the role of young people and foster more participation in decision-making, such as a Youth test on legislative proposals, in line with the Commission's objectives to enshrine intergenerational solidarity in the Union's Treaties.

"We should work with all generations, young and old. Without a true intergenerational solidarity, we cannot promote and achieve a dignified and socially fair present and future for all our brothers and sisters."

(CARD. JEAN-CLAUDE HOLLERICH S.J.)

2ND COMECE CATHOLIC YOUTH CONVENTION ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE



Screenshot of the 2nd Catholic Youth Convention 'Sharing our dreams on the future of Europe' held online on 2 June 2022.

During the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), young people were called to take part in the initiative's workings, in the citizens' panels, and in the dedicated events and activities in the Member States.

COMECE contributed to the CoFoE with a Catholic youth perspective, organising the 2nd Catholic Youth Convention, ‘*Sharing our dreams on the future of Europe*’, with the Brussels office of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

For the second time since June 2021, around one-hundred young people from all over Europe heard our call and gathered in a 2-day online event to reflect on their vision for Europe. The meeting featured the participation of EU Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi and offered young people the opportunity to discuss issues linked to education, democracy, the environment and the role of youth in South-East Europe. They presented their recommendations to CoFoE Plenary representatives and exchanged their ideas and visions for the continent’s future.

LAUNCH OF THE COMECE YOUTH NET



Screenshot of the launching session of the COMECE Youth Net, held online on 5 October 2022.

In the context of the European Year of Youth, the Secretariat launched the COMECE Youth Net, a consultative body involving young delegates from the Catholic Episcopates of the European Union. Aged between 18 and 35 years old, their mandate will last two years, during which they will be called to make their voice heard on EU policies that directly concern them. Their vision will be integrated into the working settings of the Secretariat of COMECE, as the Youth Net will be consulted on various policy dossiers, bringing young people’s perspective and sensitivity to all dimensions of EU policymaking.

The topic of their first year of work is “*Protecting our democracy and fundamental values*”. Members of the Youth Net started gathering inputs for the written contribution they will present in 2023 to the COMECE Plenary Assembly and EU officials.

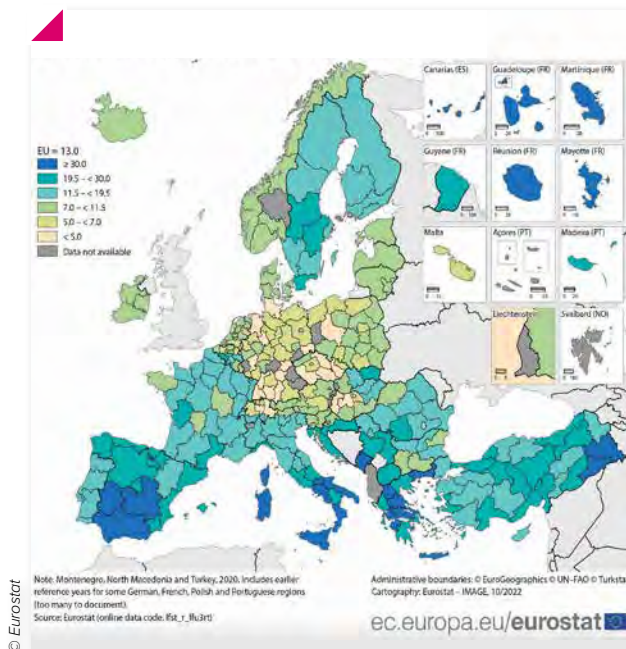
THE COMECE YOUTH PLATFORM



Screenshot of a session of the Spring Meeting of the COMECE Youth Platform, held online on 9 May 2022.

Launched in April 2019, the COMECE Youth Platform gathers over 10 European Catholic youth networks and provides a space to share good practices, training and capacity-building opportunities, and to strengthen synergies in promoting the Common Good.

During the 2022 Spring Meeting of the COMECE Youth Platform, also on the wave of COMECE’s other youth-driven activities, members devoted particular attention to their activities on the European Year of Youth and cooperation with the newly established COMECE Youth Net. They discussed common challenges in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and exchanged with a representative of the Bavarian Youth Council on enhancing possibilities for youth dialogue in Europe, also in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe.



Youth unemployment rate in 2021 in Europe.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND EVENTS

22 March

Final report of the Interfaith Youth Convention on the European Green Deal. The report includes a series of recommendations elaborated by young people expressed during the Interfaith Youth Convention on the European Green Deal, which featured the participation of the Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans.

9 May

Spring Meeting of the COMECE Youth Platform.

2 June

First session of the 2nd Catholic Youth Convention on the Future of Europe, jointly organised by COMECE and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

15 June

Second session of the 2nd Catholic Youth Convention on the Future of Europe, jointly organised by COMECE and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

28 September

European Year of Youth Policy Dialogue with Maciej Popowski.

5 October

Launch of the COMECE Youth Net. ▀



EU Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi participating in the COMECE-KAS event on "Youth and South-East Europe" held online on 15 June 2022.

COMMUNICATION

▲ Since 2017, the Press Office has been networking with media actors of the EU Member States, with the result of dramatically increasing the presence of COMECE in the press.

This has also led to establishing channels and partnerships for easier dissemination of news related to COMECE's work, especially towards the press offices of each EU Episcopate.

To meet the needs of the press and press offices, the COMECE Press Office has also digitalised its communication, opening social media channels and producing multimedia elements (mainly photos and videos) easily accessible from the website.

On February 2022, the Press Office of the Secretariat launched a new website to provide users with a more intuitive and user-friendly experience presenting COMECE's dialogue mission with the EU institutions. New communication tools were introduced along with the website, while others were improved.

A NEW WEBSITE FOR COMECE



Screenshot of the homepage of COMECE new website.

The new website highlights the identity of COMECE, its structure, history, communication and, especially, its contribution to policies and activities of the institutions of the European Union.

The webpage features a refreshed look, improved navigation and a handful of new elements, making the overall experience more impactful on desktop, mobile and tablet.

Content and communication features have been boosted, while an internal search tool will soon allow users to explore the entire activity of COMECE.

The new website includes an essential novelty: the languages tool, which also makes the entire website available to people who do not speak English. The website can now be accessed in all the European Union's official languages.

The website was designed and realised with the support of Carlos Ortiz de Diego (Spain) and Yuhyun Kim (South Korea), two extraordinary young professionals who have been doing their internship at the COMECE Press Office between 2021 and 2022.

The website has been nominated for the 2022 EU WebAwards in the "Laureals" category, a competition organised by EURid, the non-profit organisation appointed by the European Commission as the domain name registry that operates the .eu top-level domain.

The Newsletter is embedded in the structure of the new website and respects all GDPR requirements.

All publications elaborated by the Secretariat of COMECE since 1996 are now available on the website. Each document can be found through a search filter embedded in the website. All publications can be found according to the topic, keywords, and year of publication.

RADIO PROGRAMME



Photo taken following the broadcast of an episode of *Rethinking Europe* at the Brussels headquarter of RCF.

NEWSLETTER & PUBLICATIONS



Alessandro Di Maio visiting the office of the Catholic Czech newspaper *Katolický Týdeník*. In the photo together with Director Kateřina Koubová and the rest of the team. The meeting took place in Prague (Czech Republic) in December 2022.

The old Weekly has been replaced by a regular and public Newsletter directed to a larger audience of representatives of EU Bishops' Conferences, EU institutions, journalists, academics and private citizens.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

WWW.COMECE.EU

- Join our mail-list to receive our Newsletter and Press Releases.
- : @comeceEU
- Download and share photos and videos from our YouTube and Flickr accounts

COMECE PLENARY ASSEMBLY AND AUDIENCE WITH THE HOLY FATHER

SPRING PLENARY ASSEMBLY

17 March 2022

The Assembly was held in Bratislava (Slovakia) and focused on the war in Ukraine that started a few weeks earlier with Russia's brutal military aggression. The Bishops delegated by the Episcopates of the EU Member States bordering Ukraine informed the Assembly of actions taken by the local Church, government and society to welcome and support refugees fleeing the war-torn country.

H. Em. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ expressed deep respect for all countries welcoming refugees, especially Poland and Slovakia. *"This sincere solidarity – he stated – reflects Christian and European values"*.

The Bishops also discussed some of the most pressing social challenges in European societies on the 3rd Catholic Social Days (17-20 March) agenda, such as demographic transition and family life, technological and digital transition, and ecological transition.

Finally, the Assembly also approved the establishment of a COMECE youth consultative network by the Secretariat to represent the voice of young Catholics in the COMECE contributions to the institutions of the European Union.

AUTUMN PLENARY ASSEMBLY

12-14 October 2022

In the context of the war in Ukraine and the increasing international tensions between major powers, the Bishops of COMECE made a strong



Photo of the Spring Assembly. Bratislava, March 2022.



Card. Hollerich, Mgr. Crociata and Mgr. Vokál during the Autumn Assembly, Brussels, October 2022.



Mgr. Hérard and Mgr. Hoogenboom during the Autumn Assembly, Brussels, October 2022.

appeal to Russia to “immediately suspend the hostilities [against Ukraine], and to all parties to open themselves up to the negotiation of ‘serious proposals’ for a just peace, to work towards a solution to the conflict, which respects international law and the territorial integrity of Ukraine”.

The appeal is part of a statement where the Bishops expressed their “deep sadness at the horrific human suffering inflicted on the people of Ukraine” and conveyed the closeness of their Episcopates to “the millions of refugees and to all those who suffer because of this madness of war”, as well as their deep concern that recent actions may “risk a further expansion of the war with disastrous consequences for humanity”.

Following an in-depth discussion on the war in Ukraine and its increasingly dramatic socio-economic implications affecting citizens in Europe and beyond, the EU Bishops stressed “the deep value of the European Union and its founding vision”. They strongly encouraged EU and national political leaders “to maintain their unity and to remain committed to the European project”.

POPE FRANCIS RECEIVES THE PRESIDENCY OF COMECE 12-15 December 2022

The Standing Committee of COMECE had a private audience with the Holy Father to discuss the war in Ukraine and its humanitarian, social, diplomatic, geopolitical and economic implications. A major topic of discussion was the contribution that Catholics can give to make Europe an agent of peace and solidarity in the world.

The COMECE Presidency also held several meetings with other Holy See representatives, including:

- **H. Em. Card. Pietro Parolin**
(Secretary of State of His Holiness);
- **H.E. Mgr. Paul Gallagher**
(Secretary for Relations with States);
- **H.Em. Card. Kevin Farrell**
(Prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life)
- **H.Em. Card. Michael Czerny S.J.**
(Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development);



Photo of the Autumn Assembly. Brussels, October 2022.



Mgr. Nuno Brás da Silva Martins during the Autumn Assembly, Brussels, October 2022.

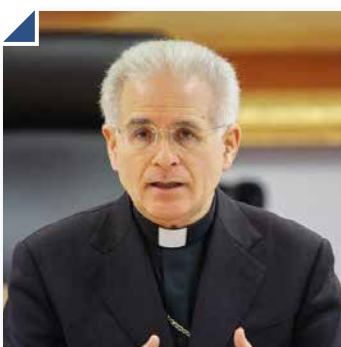


Pope Francis discussing with the members of the COMECE Standing Committee on 12 December 2022.

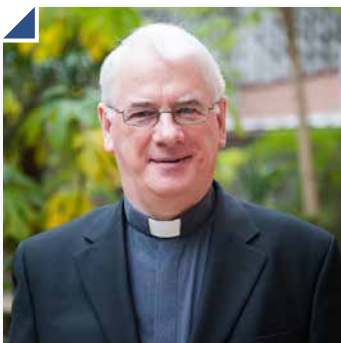
- **Sr. Alessandra Smerilli F.M.A.**
(Secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development);
- **H.Em. Card. Mario Grech**
(Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops);
- **Her Excellency Alexandra Valkenburg**,
EU Ambassador to the Holy See.



Card. Hollerich (Luxembourg)



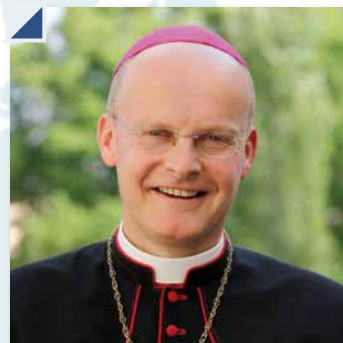
Mgr. Crociata (Italy)



Mgr. Treanor (Ireland) until nov 2022



Mgr. Vokál (Czech Republic)



Mgr. Overbeck (Germany)

COMECE PRESIDENCY

According to the statute of COMECE, the Presidency is composed of a President and four Vice-Presidents elected by the COMECE Assembly from among its members. They are representatives of the geographical distribution of the Episcopates of the European Union. Their mandate lasts for a period of five years and is renewable only once.

The current Presidency:

- **President: Card. Hollerich (Luxembourg)**
- **First Vice-President: Mgr. Crociata (Italy)**
- **Vice-President: Mgr. Treanor (Ireland)**
- **Vice-President: Mgr. Vokál (Czech Republic)**
- **Vice-President: Mgr. Overbeck (Germany)**

BISHOPS DELEGATED TO COMECE

COMECE members are the Episcopal Conferences in the EU. Each member Bishops' Conference appoints a delegate Bishop to the Assembly of COMECE. A single Bishop represents Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The COMECE Assembly includes one observer member from each of the following Bishop's Conferences: Switzerland, Scotland, England and Wales, the International Bishop's Conference of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

H.E. Mgr. Lodewijk AERTS



Bishop of Bruges (Belgium)



H.Em. Card. Jean-Claude HOLLERICH



Archbishop of Luxembourg (Luxembourg)



H.E. Mgr. Virgil BERCEA



Bishop of Oradea Mare/Gran Varadino (Romania)



H.E. Mgr. Theodorus C.M. HOOGENBOOM



Auxiliary Bishop of Utrecht (The Netherlands)



H.E. Mgr. Nuno BRÁS DA SILVA MARTINS



Bishop of Funchal (Portugal)



H.E. Mgr. Anton JAMNIK



Auxiliary Bishop of Ljubljana (Slovenia) *since May 2022*



H.E. Mgr. Mariano CROCIATA



Bishop of Latina (Italy)



H.E. Mgr. Philippe JOURDAN



Apostolic Administrator of Estonia



H.E. Mgr. Joseph GALEA-CURMI



Auxiliary Bishop of Malta (Malta)



H.E. Mgr. Czeslaw KOZON



Bishop of Copenhagen (Nordic Bishops' Conference)



H.E. Mgr. Jozef HAL'KO



Auxiliary Bishop of Bratislava (Slovakia)



H.E. Mgr. Andris KRAVALIS



Auxiliary Bishop of Riga (Latvia)



H.E. Mgr. Antoine HÉROUARD



Archbishop of Dijon (France)



H.E. Mgr. Juan Antonio MARTÍNEZ CAMINO SJ



Auxiliary Bishop of Madrid (Spain) *since April 2022*



H.E. Mgr. Gábor MOHOS



Auxiliary Bishop of
Esztergom-Budapest
(Hungary) *since June 2022*



H.E. Mgr. Manuel NIN, O.S.B.



Apostolic Exarch to the Greek
Byzantine Catholic Church
(Greece)



H.E. Mgr. Rimantas NORVILA



Bishop of Vilnius
(Lithuania)



H.E. Mgr. Franz-Josef OVERBECK



Bishop of Essen and Military
Bishop (Germany)



H.E. Mgr. Christo PROYKOV



Apostolic Exarch of Sofia
(Bulgaria)



H.E. Mgr. Ivan ŠAŠKO



Auxiliary Bishop of Zagreb
(Croatia) *since Nov 2022*



Observers

H.E. Mgr. Markus BÜCHEL



Bishop of St-Gallen
(Switzerland)



**H.E. Mgr. Hugh (Edward)
GILBERT, O.S.B.**



Bishop of Aberdeen
(Scotland)



H.E. Mgr. Selim Jean SFEIR



Archbishop of the Maronites
(Cyprus)



H.E. Mgr. Janusz STEPNOWSKI



Bishop of Łomża (Poland)



H.E. Mgr. Jan VOKÁL



Bishop of Hradec Králové
(Czech Republic)



**H.E. Mgr. Ägidius Johann
ZSIFKOVICS**



Bishop of Eisenstadt (Austria)



H.E. Mgr. Ferenc CSERHÁTI *Until June 2022*
Auxiliary Bishop of Esztergom-Budapest (Hungary)



H.E. Mgr. Adolfo GONZÁLEZ MONTES *Until April 2022*
Bishop of Almería (Spain)



H.E. Mgr. Vjekoslav Huzjak *Until November 2022*
Bishop of Bjelovar-Križevci (Croatia)



H.E. Mgr. Franc ŠUŠTAR *Until May 2022*
Auxiliary Bishop of Ljubljana (Slovenia)



H.E. Mgr. Zbignevs STANKEVIČS
Metropolitan Archbishop of Riga (Latvia)



H.E. Mgr. Noel TREANOR *Until November 2022*
Bishop of Down and Connor (Ireland)

H.E. Mgr. Stanislav HOČEVAR



Archbishop of Belgrade
(Serbia)



H.E. Mgr. Nicholas HUDSON



Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster
(England and Wales)



SECRETARIAT STAFF

The Secretariat ensures the continuity of COMECE's work. Its headquarter is in Brussels (Belgium). A small team monitors and analyses EU policies and initiatives and strives to contribute to the relevant processes. The Secretariat reports to the Presidency and the Assembly.

Fr. Manuel Enrique Barrios Prieto

General Secretary

Alessandro Calcagno

Assistant General Secretary and Legal Advisor for Fundamental Rights and Article 17 TFEU

Michael Kuhn

Senior Advisor in charge of Ecology & Sustainability

José-Luis Bazán

Legal Adviser for Migration, Asylum & International Religious Freedom

Marek Mišák

Policy Adviser for EU External Affairs

Friederike Ladenburger

Legal Advisor for Ethics, Research and Health

Emilio Dogliani

Policy Adviser for Education, Culture & Youth Policy

Alix de Wasseige

Policy Adviser for Social & Economic Affairs, and Youth Policy

Johannes Moravitz

Adviser on Ecology, Energy and Agriculture

Stefan Lunte

Adviser, General Secretary of Justice and Peace Europe

Alessandro Di Maio

Press & Communication Manager

Maud Oger

Personal Assistant to the General Secretary

Carolina Ducoing

Office Manager

Albert Arevalo

Logistical Support

Olivier Coevoet

Volunteer

The Secretariat expresses its deep appreciation for **Cynthia Quijano Aquino**, who has been supporting the team of COMECE over the last 8 years.

The Secretariat also thanks the voluntary interns that assisted in the course of the year:

Lidia Juhyun Kim (South Korea)

Alexander Simoen (Belgium)

Alexander Muhr (Austria)

Anne-Flore Valdeyron (France)

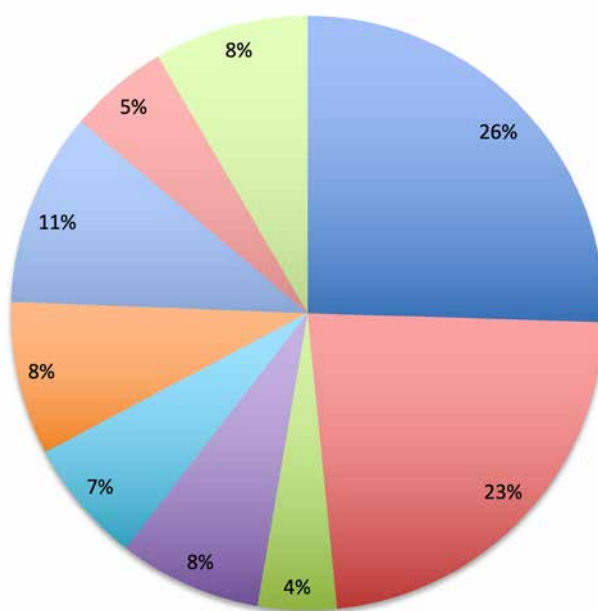
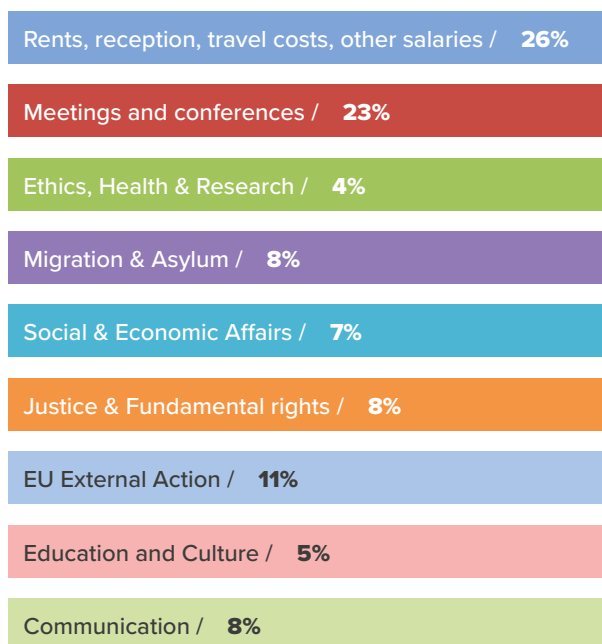
Marina Paula Oliveira (Brazil)

Khatia Platchiasvili (Georgia)

FINANCES

Total expenditure in the year 2022: **1.101.486 €**
(Preliminary Financial Statement, February 2023)

The Secretariat of COMECE and its activities are financed exclusively by the contributions of its Member Bishops' Conferences. The Secretariat of COMECE is registered in the EU transparency Register under the identification number: **47350036909-69**



This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Cover-annual-report-main

H.Em. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ, President of COMECE, while visiting a reception centre for Ukrainian refugees in Poland. (Photo: COMECE)

Cover-annual-report-special

Official logo of the 3rd edition of the European Catholic Social Days. (Photo: ECSD)



www.comece.eu

19, Square de Meeûs, B-1050 Brussels

Tel. +32 (2) 235 05 10

Fax +32 (2) 230 33 34

Mail: comece@comece.eu

