



*Danish Presidency
of the Council of the European Union
July – December 2025*

**CEC and COMECE expressing
Churches' concerns and perspectives**

Introduction

Denmark took up the reins of the EU Council Presidency in a period marked by significant challenges and uncertainty inside the EU, as well as in the world. Requests for reactions and reforms of some existing policies are intensifying. In this context, we acknowledge the efforts of the Danish EU Presidency to lead initiatives in crucial areas, including external and internal security and economy, competitiveness, the effort on green Europe, as well as the EU enlargement.

It has become a consolidated and fruitful practice for COMECE (Commission of the Episcopates of the European Union) and CEC (Conference of European Churches) to **engage in dialogue with EU Presidencies**. This long-standing practice finds its basis in **Article 17, paragraph 3 TFEU**, which asks for an open, transparent and regular dialogue between the EU on the one hand and Churches, religious associations or communities on the other.

Together, CEC and COMECE represent a membership of around 380 million citizens throughout EU Member States, and they are strongly committed to the further development of the European project on the basis of the **Christian ideals of human dignity, mutual respect, justice, peace, freedom, and the integrity of creation**.

This commitment is based on **the biblical foundation of our faith**, our understanding of the world as creation in which human beings are created in God's image and likeness, and our understanding of fulfilment of this creation offered through the life and redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Christian faith acknowledges the positive role of **freedom balanced with responsibility**, accepts God's mandate given to humanity to care for the created world and upholds justice and respect for our neighbours. Our faith prompts us to be active in the public space and to bring forward our values in dialogue with our partners and with politics.

Churches in the EU are committed to concrete dialogue on policies, and they work jointly to ensure that respect for the **values of human dignity, democracy, solidarity, freedom, equality, and the rule of law** are at the forefront of each EU initiative both in Europe and globally.

In this context, COMECE and CEC wish to **accompany the Danish Presidency** of the EU Council in the **implementation of its priorities**, focusing on some of the most pressing challenges.

I. Equipping Europe for the future - EU strategic agenda: democracy and values-based policies

Unity and solidarity

Europe and the world are facing multiple challenges. Joint efforts for justice, peace, and respectful cooperation among countries, as well as different societal groups and religions in Europe, are in the current situation more important than ever. Recently erupted wars and military conflicts in Europe and Europe's neighbourhood have underscored the necessity of re-committing to key EU values, notably **unity and solidarity**, as guiding principles for effective joint actions within the EU and beyond its borders.

CEC and COMECE have been consistent in expressing their support for this approach over the years, while **highlighting the need for value-based policies and efforts for unity within the EU** in spite of the difficulties along the way.

We encourage Europe's leadership to work on reshaping the narratives based on the long-term trends that characterise the European integration process. The European Union has to be a space of **shared solidarity, respect and a common vision that includes but goes beyond the vision of prosperity and achieved economic aims**. Christian values, shared by a majority of European citizens, can provide orientation and a guarantee of a safe approach to the changes we face, as well as contribute to overcoming societal gaps and strengthening the cohesion on the continent. Responses to new challenges have to go hand in hand with the remembrance of the positive vision on which the European Union was built, by **honouring the common values of the Union**, as well as by highlighting its achievements.

Strengthening social cohesion and addressing polarisation in society

To the core concerns of Churches belong the **protection and care for the most vulnerable** and assisting those who suffer from different forms of poverty and exclusion. We encourage political decision makers to take appropriate actions aimed at supporting the provision of assistance to those suffering from different forms of poverty and paying particular attention to the need of avoiding social exclusion.

In view of Europe's strategic agenda for the next years, it is vital to safeguard and strengthen the Union through **fostering the cohesion** inside our societies and among European peoples and nations, promoting **mutual respect**, strengthening **common values** and taking an **active stand against fundamentalism and polarisation** in society. Especially in a time of multiple and overlapping crises, it is crucial that the EU proves what it is capable of achieving for its citizens, particularly in the area of **social security, job security and a secure income**.

Churches contributing to the well-being of a democratic society

Civil society, as well as **Churches and religious communities**, play a significantly **positive role in European societies** and in countering dangerous phenomena that divide our societies, such as the spread of reductive ideologies, disinformation, societal polarisation, populism, xenophobia, or even radicalisation and violent extremism. At the same time, we are concerned about **the misuse and instrumentalization of religion**, negative narratives portraying religion as a source of problems, as well as undue restrictions to freedom of conscience and religion. Following up on previous initiatives, CEC and COMECE wish to re-confirm their joint **efforts for truth, justice, peace, protection of democracy and respectful cooperation among states guided by international law**, as well as different societal groups and religions in Europe.

While rejecting any form of instrumentalization of religion and any violence based on religious grounds, CEC and COMECE reiterate their willingness to work together with policymakers in view of **contributing to a cultivated discussion about the role of religion in a democratic society**, respectful of recognised fundamental rights of every human being.

Obviously, respect for the **core fundamental right to freedom of religion in all its dimensions** (individual, collective, public, private and institutional) is a key part of this discourse. In this area, we also see the need to break the **majorities vs. minorities dynamic** that underpins the approach of some to freedom of religion and protection from discrimination.

The **‘European Democracy Shield’** should be launched during the semester. We believe **countering disinformation** and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) requires a sound **coordination and joint effort** within the EU and among its Member States. At the same time, any policy in this regard should fully respect **freedom of expression** and information, as well as **freedom of thought, conscience and religion**. **Accountability and transparency of media**, including social media, high quality, independent, **impartial** and accountable **fact-checkers** are all important elements. For the external dimension, we would emphasise the need for stronger **cooperation with EU delegations** in third countries. Strengthening societal resilience and preparedness is also paramount and for this we need **education** systems that equip young people with **critical thinking, media literacy**, including with regard to the functioning of algorithms and civic education. The integrity of electoral processes would be greatly supported by strong **transparency rules for financial contributions to political parties**. In fostering **citizens’ participation** and engagement prudent respect for the **principle of subsidiarity** is crucial.

II. Defence, Security and Peace

Towards a just and lasting peace in Ukraine

For more than three years now, Ukraine and its people have stood firmly in defence – not only of their own territorial integrity and freedom but also of shared European values – against Russia’s full-scale war of aggression. COMECE and CEC have consistently voiced deep concern over the immense human suffering, expressing solidarity with the victims and advocating for sustained European support to Ukraine and its people. Amid growing geopolitical instability, we urge **continued European unity and concerted action to achieve a just and lasting peace for Ukraine**, grounded in respect for international law. Any credible and sincere dialogue effort should be underpinned by continued strong transatlantic and global solidarity and it must involve the victim of the aggression, Ukraine. Moreover, joint efforts are needed **to assist with Ukraine’s material reconstruction and long-term reconciliation efforts**—endeavours in which Churches play an active role and require adequate support from policymakers.

European Security and Defence Policy serving the goal of Peace

Growing security challenges—from armed conflicts in neighbouring regions to hybrid and cyber threats—have propelled the EU and its Member States to invest more in their security and defence capabilities, as recently outlined in the White Paper for European Defence “Readiness 2030”. While acknowledging the need for responsible and cooperative engagement in this area, including the development of effective European defence tools within a broader strategic framework, we urge the Danish EU Presidency to equally prioritise the **putting in place of robust oversight mechanisms to make sure that respective measures are consistent with the promotion of human security and peace**.

Consequently, these control mechanisms should ensure that all actions in the area of security and defence adhere to the principles of *necessity*, *proportionality*, and *adequacy*, while also upholding human rights, the rule of law, and ethical norms. In EU-supported defence investments, including those under the European Defence Fund and the SAFE financial instrument, a particular scrutiny should be applied to automated defence technologies, such as uncrewed armed systems. They should only be developed and used following thorough legal and ethical evaluations.

With regard to the other violent conflicts and instabilities in Europe's neighbourhood, in particular in the **Middle East** and in the **South Caucasus**, which are of great concern to us, we plead for **intensified diplomatic efforts** for a peaceful and sustainable resolution of these crises.

Article 3(1) of the TEU 'The Union's deep-rooted commitment to human security and peace', alongside its diverse policy toolbox, positions it as a unique global actor capable of promoting lasting peace through a holistic and integrated approach. Even in the face of war, we must **resist the normalisation of conflict and instead foster a new architecture of peace** - both within Europe and globally. The growing international polarisation calls for preserving longstanding partnerships and alliances, including with the United Kingdom and the United States, while seeking to open up new processes of dialogue and cooperation.

In view of the negotiations on the next EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework, we share the **concerns of numerous civil society organisations, including faith-based actors, that the area of humanitarian action and development assistance may experience serious reductions** due to shifting strategic priorities and an approach that prioritises economic or geopolitical interests over solidarity. Particularly in fragile and conflict-affected countries a merely investment-oriented approach falls short of effectively addressing the basic needs of the grassroots communities and of supporting their integral and sustainable development.

Recommendations:

- Maintain European unity in the concrete **solidarity with Ukraine and its people**, while intensifying global efforts towards a sustainable and just peace for Ukraine, one that fully respects international law and is underpinned by effective security guarantees, allowing Ukrainian families to reunite and live a life in dignity, security and freedom in their sovereign and independent homeland.
- **Initiate a multi-stakeholder consultation process to develop a 'European Peace Strategy'** – a guiding framework to consolidate the concept of 'peace' and strengthen the EU's integrated approach to peacebuilding, conflict prevention and peace diplomacy, while ensuring that efforts in the area of security and defence are coherent with these objectives.
- Make sure that the next EU long-term budget foresees **adequate resources for the areas of humanitarian action and development cooperation**, granting access to financial and capacity-building support for the non-profit sector, including churches and faith-based actors, who are often engaged in delivering humanitarian aid, psycho-social assistance and material reconstruction in conflict-affected areas where other actors are not present.

III. A citizen-centred, credible and fair EU enlargement process

With Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine fought in the heart of Europe for more than two years and with the geopolitical developments in EU's neighbourhood, the EU accession process has regained **strategic importance for stability, prosperity and peace** on the European continent. CEC and COMECE welcome the inclusion of EU enlargement in the Danish EU Council Presidency's priorities and encourage European leaders to **act in unity for achieving concrete progress** in the process of EU accession, based on the reports and recommendations of the European Commission. The EU integration process of the Western Balkan as well as the Eastern European countries aspiring to a future EU membership, should, however, not only be seen as a geopolitical necessity or an economic investment, but **above all as a strong message of hope for both, the citizens of these countries**, who have often had to endure hardships and sacrifices along the way, as well as **for citizens of already existing EU Member States**.

Accession to the EU is a **two-way process**. The countries aspiring to a future EU membership must continue pursuing the necessary structural reforms in crucial areas, especially the rule of law, strengthening of democratic institutions, fundamental rights, including religious freedom and freedom of the media, as well as fight against corruption, and tackling organised crime. At the same time, a citizen-centred, credible and fair EU enlargement process should encourage and, **in a timely, adequate and tangible manner, respond to these reform efforts**, while avoiding any double-standards in the treatment of the candidate countries, which, in turn, may lead to frustrations and anti-European sentiments in the population.

The credibility of the EU accession process also implies concrete steps on the side of the European Union to become ready to welcome new members. A larger and more diverse EU will have to **rethink political, institutional, administrative and budgetary questions** in order to allow its members and institutions to act in a timely and effective manner, while reaffirming the principles of **solidarity and subsidiarity**. We believe that Europe has a future if it is truly a community, cherishing unity in diversity. Therefore, we feel the need for **a deeper reflection on the common value basis and the special bonds that unite us as a European family** of peoples and countries, different, and yet, linked by a common history and destiny. CEC and COMECE stand ready to contribute to such a **participatory dialogue**, which we believe is important in view of inclining **public opinion** in European societies towards the beneficial role of the EU enlargement within the EU, as well as in the candidate countries.

Recommendations:

- To advance a **citizen-centred EU enlargement process** in a **credible** and **fair** manner with the candidate countries, while initiating steps towards necessary EU reforms in political, institutional, administrative and budgetary aspects.
- To launch a **reflection on the common fundament of values and principles** in an enlarged and more diverse European Union, **with contributions from Churches** and other stakeholders from the candidate countries.

➤ To support **people-to-people cross-border exchanges** between the citizens of the candidate countries and of EU Members States at different levels, allowing for **a dialogue of cultures and historical experiences** in view of fostering personal contacts and social cohesion already during the accession negotiations phase.

IV. Migration and Asylum

CEC and COMECE share the view that migration and asylum policies must protect the **inherent dignity of every person and the fundamental rights rooted in it**. Fair and truly humane EU migration and asylum policies need to be based on the principles of subsidiarity, solidarity and responsibility, and the protection of the common good. Asylum seekers and their families coming to the EU should have access to shelter and basic human needs, as well as to an individual, fast, and fair asylum procedure under EU responsibility. Limitations in the access to the EU territory to apply for asylum should be justified and exceptional, in accordance to international law. In our view, moving asylum seekers to presumably “safe third countries” with which they have no connection is not justified.

Reception systems in EU Members States, especially those at the EU external borders, are frequently overcrowded and many times in precarious conditions that do not comply with EU legislation. We call on the Danish EU Presidency to use the implementation of the “Pact” to work with the other Member States on **improving the situation of migrants and asylum seekers in deficient reception centers**. Exploring the possibility of **provisional alternative or additional private accommodation** for migrants and asylum seekers could also be a common ground for joint efforts by public authorities, civil society, and Churches.

We encourage the EU Presidency to intensify the efforts to **address transversally the multidimensional root causes of migration to the EU**, while supporting the countries of origin and transit in their efforts to improve the conditions of people leaving or crossing their territories. To guarantee the right of everyone to remain in his/her homeland in dignity and safety and not to be forced to leave should be a primary objective.

We also call on the EU Presidency to provide **more space for protective safe legal passages into Europe** – through resettlement, humanitarian visas, family reunification or visa exception- following reasonable security checks and considering the real labour market and state budget possibilities. The first pledging cycle under the EU resettlement framework should encourage Member States to be ambitious in this. In addition, meaningful routes for regular labour migration should be considered to match the needs of labour market with skills and aspirations of labour migrants while mitigating brain drain.

We cannot allow the Mediterranean Sea to become a vast cemetery, and we find it unacceptable that people continue to die at sea while attempting to cross unsafely into EU territory in search of international protection or better conditions of life. It is against this background that we call on Member States to **fulfil their international obligations regarding Search and Rescue (SAR) operations as well as to** not criminalise genuine humanitarian assistance or help of migrants in distress.

The protection given to persons displaced from Ukraine under the Temporary Protection Directive has worked well, and it should continue as long as it is needed. In this regard we welcome the recent proposals by the European Commission to extend the temporary protection until 4 March 2027, and to coordinate the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine.

Trafficking in human beings is a tragic reality that remains many times invisible to both public authorities and society. A **broad alliance between public authorities, civil society and Churches** could be instrumental to make it more visible, and to prevent and combat this criminal phenomenon more efficiently, as well as to improve the support to the victims in their way to recovery and social integration. Smugglers also benefit from the needs and desire of migrants and asylum seekers to reach the EU territory. The EU should incentivize with all its means the cooperation with countries of origin or transit to dismantle this illegal activity. The **use of new technologies, including AI**, to combat human trafficking should be explored.

The EU needs to **continue enhancing solidarity within the Union** with the Member States hosting those seeking protection to the extent that is possible, both financially and through relocation where needed, while respecting the specificities and ethos of each Member State. We encourage Member States to coordinate on offering long term perspectives to refugees from Ukraine beyond March 2027, and the recent Commission communication¹ offers some helpful suggestions in this respect.

Return of irregular migrants should be made in a fair and humane manner, respectful of the fundamental rights of returnees, avoiding both the use of detention as a first resort and the separation of family members, while protecting the most vulnerable. Voluntary returns of irregular migrants should be prioritised, including reintegration measures. We welcome these positive principles incorporated into the newly proposed Return Regulation, hoping that they are correctly and effectively implemented, if adopted, in compliance with EU and International Law. At the same time, we see other provisions in the proposal with great concern, such as the possibility to detain potential returnees based on only the suspicion they might commit offences as well as provisions for offshoring of responsibility to “return hubs” that might not be aligned with fundamental rights standards.

Recommendations:

- To provide **more space for protective safe and legal passages into Europe, matching the needs of EU labour market**.
- To guarantee **fair, speedy, and equal access and treatment of all individuals genuinely seeking international protection**.
- To build up a **broad alliance between public authorities, civil society and Churches** that can improve the conditions of migrants and asylum seekers, as well as preventing human trafficking and smuggling, and supporting the victims in their recovery and reintegration, as part of long-term integration and inclusion efforts.
- To provide **protection for those having fled Ukraine** as much as it is needed.
- **Fair and humane return** of irregular migrants, prioritising voluntary returns accompanied by reintegration measures, in compliance with EU and International Law.

¹ COM(2025) 649 final

V. Competitiveness

As the EU is facing enormous economic challenges, CEC and COMECE welcome the clear endeavour to secure the **economic well-being** of our Union and its Member States. We are aware of the fact that a strong economy is also necessary for keeping our **welfare systems**, one of Europe's shining examples of concrete solidarity.

Furthermore, it is true that in the current dominating global economic system this includes the necessity of **competitiveness**, and the attempt to fight the growing risk of industries leaving the EU and companies vanishing from our continent.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the concentration on production and profit of our economic system entails the risk of **exploitation of the poor and the earth's resources**, especially in the so-called "Global South". While the on-going "**decarbonisation of the EU**" is to be supported, this must **not** come **at the expense of the ecosystems of other continents and the rights of local communities**. True **partnerships grounded in mutual dignity** and respect are urgently needed.

We very much endorse the envisioned development of an "**optimal framework for excellent research and innovation**". The human genius has a vital role in the solution of the various crises surrounding us today and **critical technologies** can provide a significant contribution in this endeavour. However, it is important to insist on the **primacy of the human being in all ethical questions**. All **technological innovations**, including those to increase the competitiveness of the EU, must not put at risk the **dignity of every human being**.

There is a legitimate **need for regulatory simplification**, especially for small and medium enterprises, and "clarity on the impact of legislative proposals when making major future decisions" is clearly something that has been demanded by a growing number of businesses throughout the EU. Despite this need, CEC and COMECE emphasise the value of **sustainability reporting requirements**, as instruments to help guarantee the equal dignity of all human beings and environmental protection throughout the supply chains.