



## **COMECE Contribution to the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Cyprus assumes the Presidency of the Council of the European Union at a time marked by profound geopolitical tensions and increasing uncertainty, both within Europe and in its wider neighbourhood. In this context, the need for coherent and forward-looking policy responses is becoming ever more pressing. We take note with appreciation of the Cypriot Presidency's priorities, notably its focus on strengthening security and preparedness, enhancing Europe's competitiveness, promoting an open and resilient Union, and ensuring that European policies remain anchored in shared values and social cohesion.

The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) has developed over the years a constructive dialogue with the rotating Presidencies of the Council of the European Union. This engagement is rooted in Article 17(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which provides for an open, transparent and regular dialogue between the EU and Churches, religious associations and communities. Representing the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of the European Union, COMECE contributes to this dialogue by offering ethical reflection and a perspective grounded in the lived experience of the Church across Europe.

Guided by the principles of human dignity, justice, solidarity, peace, freedom and care for creation, COMECE is committed to supporting the development of the European Union in a way that places the human person at its centre. Inspired by the Christian understanding of the human person and society, we seek to engage responsibly in the public sphere, fostering dialogue and contributing to the common good.

In this spirit, COMECE wishes to accompany the Cypriot Presidency in the implementation of its priorities, offering its reflections on key areas where the European Union is called to act with unity, responsibility and vision: strengthening peace-oriented security, promoting a human-centred competitiveness, fostering an open and cooperative engagement with the world, and ensuring that no one is left behind in the Union's development.

## **II. AUTONOMY THROUGH SECURITY, DEFENCE READINESS AND PREPAREDNESS**

### **Security & Defence at the service of Peace**

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine continues to inflict immense human suffering and to destabilise European and global security. We commend the efforts of the Cypriot Presidency to sustain political, humanitarian and economic support to Ukraine and its people. We call on the EU and its Member States to maintain unity and to intensify diplomatic efforts towards a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, grounded in international law.

In the Middle East, in light of recent escalations, the European Union should renew its vocation as a project of peace by promoting de-escalation, supporting diplomatic solutions, and consistently upholding international law. The safety and wellbeing of all affected populations, including EU citizens in the region, must remain a priority.

In this context, while recognising the need for greater preparedness and responsibility in security and defence, the EU should remain faithful to its founding vision. Investments in defence must be necessary, proportionate and adequate and should not come at the expense of efforts promoting human dignity, justice, integral human development and care for creation. Defence policy must always remain clearly oriented towards peace.

### **Economic and societal resilience**

Strengthening Europe's resilience requires approaches that combine security with cooperation and responsibility. Economic security should contribute to stability, avoid fragmentation, and support partnerships that are mutually beneficial and people-centred.

We welcome the recognition of water resilience as a strategic priority. Water, as a common good essential to human dignity and social stability, requires an integrated approach that prioritises access to safe drinking water, ecosystem protection and preventive action, while ensuring that vulnerable communities are not left behind.

### **Migration and Democracy**

The implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum must ensure full respect for fundamental rights, particularly in screening, asylum access and return procedures. Search and rescue operations must remain firmly grounded in international law and human rights obligations.

We welcome the Presidency's attention to democratic resilience. In an interconnected world, challenges such as disinformation and foreign interference require coordinated responses involving public authorities, civil society and social platforms. Churches and religious communities, rooted in local societies, can contribute meaningfully to fostering trust, social cohesion and democratic participation.

### **Internal security and social cohesion**

Strengthening internal security requires addressing not only organised crime, but also societal polarisation and extremism. A comprehensive approach should combine

education, media literacy, responsible use of technology and community-based initiatives to reinforce social cohesion.

We encourage continued attention to the protection of places of worship, recognising their importance for freedom of religion and for the social fabric of European societies.

#### **Our recommendations:**

- ⇒ Embed EU security and defence efforts within a broader strategy that clearly affirms peace as the ultimate objective of European action.
- ⇒ Promote structured dialogue and cooperation with Churches and religious communities in peacebuilding, reconciliation and preparedness efforts.
- ⇒ Develop a coherent EU approach to water resilience, prioritising access to safe drinking water, sustainability and solidarity.

### **III. AUTONOMY THROUGH COMPETITIVENESS**

#### **A human-centred approach to competitiveness**

Efforts to strengthen competitiveness and the Single Market should go hand in hand with social cohesion and respect for fundamental rights. Simplification initiatives can be beneficial, including for non-profit actors, provided that they do not undermine essential legal protections.

The transition towards sustainable, low-carbon production must ensure both environmental responsibility and economic viability. Supporting farmers, reducing dependencies and strengthening resilience are essential to ensuring food security and dignity in agricultural work.

#### **Our recommendations:**

- ⇒ Promote inclusive economic policies that combine competitiveness with social cohesion.
- ⇒ Facilitate pathways for labour market inclusion, particularly for vulnerable groups, while ensuring strong safeguards against exploitation.

### **IV. OPEN TO THE WORLD, AUTONOMOUS**

#### **EU enlargement and global responsibility**

We welcome the Presidency's commitment to EU enlargement. This process should be seen not only in geopolitical or economic terms, but as a project of hope and reconciliation. It requires continued reforms by candidate countries, as well as a credible, fair and transparent approach by the EU.

The EU should pursue a relational strategic autonomy that reduces harmful dependencies while strengthening partnerships grounded in justice, human dignity and shared responsibility. Trade and cooperation policies must integrate economic objectives with social, environmental and human rights considerations.

## Southern Neighbourhood and Mediterranean

We welcome the prioritisation of the Southern Neighbourhood. Relations with this region should adopt a people-centred approach, promoting education, social cohesion and intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

Migration cooperation must ensure the protection of human dignity — including in return procedures — prevent and combat human trafficking and smuggling, uphold international obligations, and foster collaboration with partner countries.

### Our recommendations:

- ⇒ Promote citizen-centred dialogue on the values underpinning European integration and enlargement.
- ⇒ Strengthen cooperation with Churches, religious communities and faith-based organisations (FBOs) in humanitarian and development efforts, recognising their essential role on the ground and explicitly including them among the eligible actors in EU funding instruments.

## V. AN AUTONOMOUS UNION OF VALUES THAT LEAVES NO ONE BEHIND

### Social cohesion and fundamental rights

Access to affordable housing, effective anti-poverty strategies and quality social services are essential to human dignity and social cohesion. Policies should address structural causes of poverty and promote participation of those affected.

Efforts to protect minors, both online and offline, are of particular importance and should adopt a strong victim-centred approach. Privacy norms and considerations should not cause undue obstacles to the detection of offenders and victims.

Gender equality, family support and work-life balance should be promoted in a way that recognises the equal dignity of women and men and the value of care.

### Health, ageing and mental wellbeing

Policies on ageing should adopt a holistic approach that recognises the dignity, participation and contribution of older persons, while addressing vulnerabilities and inequalities.

Mental health must be addressed as a central dimension of human wellbeing, requiring a comprehensive approach that includes social, relational and cultural factors alongside clinical care.

Technological and scientific innovation, including in biotechnology, should always respect the precautionary principle and consider ethical and societal implications.

### Our recommendations:

- ⇒ Promote policies that place the person at the centre, particularly in areas of poverty, ageing and health.

- ⇒ Integrate mental health across EU policy frameworks as a key element of public health.
- ⇒ Ensure that technological and scientific progress remains guided by ethical responsibility.

## VI. A LONG-TERM BUDGET FOR AN AUTONOMOUS UNION

### MFF 2028-2034

The next Multiannual Financial Framework should reflect a balanced vision of security, development and social cohesion. Investments in defence should not undermine funding for policies that promote peace, human development and poverty eradication.

EU external action should remain firmly anchored in long-term development objectives, particularly in fragile and vulnerable contexts.

Local actors, including Churches and faith-based organisations, play a crucial role in delivering social services and supporting communities, and should be meaningfully included in EU programmes.

#### Our recommendations:

- ⇒ Ensure that EU funding supports both security and the broader conditions for peace, including development and social cohesion.
- ⇒ Guarantee fair and non-discriminatory access to EU funding for civil society and faith-based actors.
- ⇒ Maintain strong support for social investment instruments that reduce inequalities and strengthen cohesion across the Union.