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CSC Update on European Affairs

TOPICS COVERED:

Future of the Lisbon Treaty; European elections 2009; Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network; CSC seminar on Islam, Christianity and Europe; intercultural dialogue; migration; upcoming CSC events.

European Integration

Waiting for Lisbon (Treaty)

Ever since Ireland as the only country to hold a referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon voted 'no' on 12 June 2008, the Treaty reform process has been going through a period of great uncertainty. Due to the current global economic crisis, which is likely to occupy the next European Council on 15 October, the decisive discussions on the fate of the Lisbon Treaty are expected to be held only at the December Summit. There are many who wish - not least because of the judicial limbo caused by the expiration of some of the provisions the Nice Treaty without a new legal basis (see Europe Update N° 18) - that the Irish people would vote (yes) before the European elections on 4-7 June 2009. At the moment, a second referendum in September or October 2009 appears to be a more realistic possibility for Ireland.

Since the last Europe Update (July), the Treaty of Lisbon has been ratified by Italy and Finland. Sweden is expected to vote on the Treaty on 20 November. In Germany the President has refused to sign the document until the country's Constitutional Court delivers a ruling on legal challenges. The approval of the Treaty is most unclear in the Czech Republic which has indicated reluctance to continue ratification after the Irish no vote. 19 out of 27 EU Member States have finalised the entire procedure, which means that they have deposited their instrument of ratification with the Government of Italy.

Consolidated text of the Lisbon Treaty:

http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/full_text/index_en.htm.

European elections 2009

Next June, Europeans again have an opportunity to cast their vote to elect members of the European Parliament. CSC - together with the Churches Commission for Migrants' in Europe (CCME), Aprodev and Eurodiaconia - is working on a document which not only informs about the role of the European Parliament and the issues which the EP will address in the coming years, but also highlights the hopes, aspirations and concerns of the ecumenical organisations in Europe regarding the future of Europe. The joint publication, likely to be published in English and German in January 2009, seeks to encourage churches in Europe to play an active role in raising citizens' awareness of the upcoming EP elections and to enable churches across the EU to raise churches' concerns in debates with the parties and individuals running for the European Parliament elections.

Environment

7th Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network called churches to further their work to curb climate change

The message of the 7th Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) to churches is that "global warming is a reality" and that "the time to act is now!"

The final statement of the Assembly, attached to this Europe Update, underlines that: "The roots of human destruction of the environment are to be sought not just in actions, but in our most deep-seated attitudes. It is not enough for humans to stay alive by consuming the world around them; they need a relationship with the world that is not purely utilitarian and market-based".

Churches need to come together to overcome the threat of water shortages, decreased harvests, natural disasters, diseases, migration and many other projected effects of climate change. The Assembly delegates called on the church leaders "to develop their own comprehensive road-map, with timescales and clear goals, to help counter global warming".

The final statement urges church leaders, church communities across the continent and individual Christians to address their respective governments and political representatives in the European Parliament in the next few months, where important decisions will be taken - "significant cuts of greenhouse gas emissions have to be achieved through efforts here and now."

While calling for further action, the delegates welcomed the Assembly as an important forum to share experiences and good practices, which are now undertaken by churches in many countries of Europe.

Besides the final statement, the Assembly issued a separate message on water. This message, amongst other things, reminded the churches in Europe of their responsibility to call for a more equal share of European aid to support public water services in the South and to watch that no undue political pressure is made through European institutions to privatise their water supplies. The Assembly invited the churches to endorse the right of poorer countries and communities to access water, and to maintain the control and management of their own water resources.

The Assembly entitled "the true challenge of climate change" met, at the invitation of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy in Triuggio near Milan on 24-28 September.

"Water in a changing climate"- paper as well as other documents, news and photos related to the Assembly are available at:

<http://www.ecen.org/cms/index.php?page=milan08>

Intercultural Dialogue

Islam, Christianity and Europe

On 11 September some hundred people from the European institutions and NGOs or representing religious communities and the academic world gathered for a dialogue on "the external relations of the European Union with Muslim countries and international responsibility of religious communities". The concept of reciprocity raised major concerns among Muslims who felt that it tended to be used by the dominant side as an argument not to grant Muslims their full freedom of religion in Europe. The understanding of reciprocity by those Christian participants who defended the use of the notion was different. Reciprocity should not mean retaliation - which is the negative way of using the term - but be embedded both in the 'Silver Rule' ("Do not do to others as you would not have them do to you"), as well as in the 'Golden Rule' ("Do onto others as you would wish them do onto you"). It was argued that fundamentally any relationship, from a moral point of view, necessarily implies reciprocity. The seminar concluded that in European relations with majority Muslim countries, politics and religion have the potential to be mutually beneficial. If the European Union creates good relations where human rights - including freedom of religion - are promoted, religions will follow and vice-versa. Besides religions, the secular society plays a crucial role in this work.

The four Islam, Christianity and Europe seminars (see Europe Updates N° 16-19) formed a part of the contribution of CSC, the Commission of Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) to the

European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. The seminars, which were hosted by the European Parliament, discussed some of the burning issues of contemporary Europe in relation to religion. They also contributed to respond to a relativist secular liberalism that rejects the existence of a religious truth, and sought to advocate a pluralist liberalism which allows the public sharing of values, including religious ones. These values represent the foundation of a dialogue which is a source of hope for our multicultural societies.

The full event report of the 11 September seminar is attached to this Europe Update. The programmes and reports of the seminars as well as more information on the seminar project is available at: <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/Projectislam.shtml>

Inter-religious and intercultural dialogue at the national level

The Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, the Finnish Ecumenical Council and the Consultative Committee of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 in Finland will jointly organise a round table discussion on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue in Helsinki on 28 October. The aim of the seminar is to reflect, together with representatives of religious communities, state and EU authorities and politicians, on the significance of and need for inter-religious dialogue with a special focus on the Finnish situation. The round table discussion material will be available on the Finnish website for the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008: <http://www.vuoropuhelu.fi>

The churches and religious communities in Finland were certainly not the only ones to take part in the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. While we know about many projects we do not know them all. Please share your experience with other CEC member churches and organisations through Europe Update and write to csc@cec-kek.be.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I addresses the European Parliament

On 24 September, the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, Bartholomew I, addressed the European Parliament in the framework of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. Bartholomew I spoke of the value of the European project in promoting peace and tolerance, the importance of accepting minorities and the need for the EU to accept Turkey as a member. He also underlined his church's efforts to encourage respect for the environment.

Bartholomew I stressed the ecumenical character of his Patriarchate: "Our Ecumenical Patriarchate embraces a truly global apostolate that strives to raise and broaden the consciousness of the human family - to bring understanding that we are all dwelling in the same house." For twenty centuries the Patriarchate "has continued as a lighthouse for the human family and the Christian Church. It is from the depths of our experience

upon these deep waters of history that we offer to the contemporary world a timeless message of perennial human value.”

The Patriarch strongly pleaded for the accession of Turkey to the European Union: “Europe should not see any religion that is tolerant of others as alien to itself. The great religions, like the European project, can be a force for transcending nationalism and can even transcend nihilism and fundamentalism by focusing their faithful on what unites us as human beings, and by fostering a dialogue about what divides us. “

Introducing the Ecumenical Patriarch, EP President Hans-Gert Pöttering pointed out that recent EU enlargements had brought in the Orthodox countries of Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania. He quoted the late Pope John Paul II who used the metaphor of Europe breathing again with its two lungs after the downfall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. According to President Pöttering, “we could also use this metaphor to refer to the richness in the enlarged EU brought through the different perspectives of Western and Eastern Christianity”.

The European Parliament has used EYID as an occasion to invite several distinguished personalities to address the plenary. Besides the Ecumenical Patriarch, the invited speakers have included the following religious leaders: the Grand Mufti of Syria; Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth and the Dalai Lama.

Read more at:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/008-37895-266-09-39-901-20080923IPR37894-22-09-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+CRE+20080924+SIT+DOC+PDF+V0//EN&language=EN>

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/eplive/expert/shotlist_page/20080923SHL37974/default_de.htm

European Commission debates the role of inter-religious dialogue

The plans of the European Commission for the remaining period of time of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 include a conference which is entitled “Inter-religious dialogue: a bridge towards intercultural dialogue” and takes place in Brussels on 11 November.

Diversity shapes Europe’s Future

Upon the initiative of two of CEC associated organisations, the Intereuropean Commission on Church and School and the International Association for Christian

Education, over a hundred experts working on education gathered at the Protestant Academy in Berlin on 18-19 September to examine and develop constructive procedures for dealing with cultural and religious differences in daily life.

In her speech, Ambassador Heidrun Tempel, Special representative for dialogue among civilisations of the German Federal Foreign Office, stressed the importance of local level action to foster intercultural and inter-religious understanding and of cooperation between the political and religious worlds. Professor of Education Dr Robert Jackson from the Warwick Religion and Education Research Unit (WRERU) drew attention to the current trend within the Council of Europe and the European Union to acknowledge the special role of religions in the intercultural dialogue. The Director of the Church and Society Commission (CSC), Rev. Rüdiger Noll spoke of dialogue as a health protection which should not only be practised when conflicts occur. Dr Simona Santoro from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) made it clear that her organisation as well was active in the field of intercultural dialogue. Dr Santoro referred to the OECD Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public School as a contribution to Europe's security policy. The European Commission was represented in the meeting by its Commissioner for Education and Culture Jan Figel, and the Council of Europe by Ulrich Bunjes, one of the key figures behind the Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue.

Read more about the conference at:

<http://www.iccsweb.org/>

Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools:

http://www.osce.org/odihr/item_11_28314.html

Migration

Launch of a public consultation on the future of EU migration and asylum policy

On 25 September, the European Commission launched a public consultation on the future priorities in the areas of justice, freedom and security (JFS). The policy areas covered by JFS include, for instance, migration and asylum policy, EU citizenship and human rights. The consultation period ends on 20 November 2008.

The European Commission intends to publish a communication on the topic in April 2009. The next five-year plan (2010-2014) entitled the Stockholm Programme will be adopted during the Swedish EU Presidency in the autumn 2009.

Website of the consultation:

http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/news/consulting_public/news_consulting_0001_en.htm

European Commission website concerning the area of Justice, Freedom and Security:
http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/fsj/intro/fsj_intro_en.htm

Forthcoming events

CSC consultations

The annual Europe Secretaries meeting takes place in Leuven (near Brussels) on 20-22 October.

CSC consultation “Religion in the Public Sphere - legal challenges and trends” will be held in Brussels on 18-20 November. It is designed for lawyers in CEC member churches who deal with European and/or church and society issues.



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The Church and Society Commission (CSC) is one of the commissions of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). The CSC links CEC's 125 member churches from all over Europe and its associated organisations with the European Union's institutions, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, NATO and the UN (on European matters). It engages its member churches and associated organisations in studies and projects relevant to church and society and thus supports and strengthens the common witness of European churches vis-à-vis the European Institutions and in the respective European societies.

This publication informs CEC members on European developments and related CSC activities. Members are welcome to use this publication as a channel to inform on their respective work. For comments or further information on the issues as well as to subscribe or unsubscribe, please contact csc@cec-kek.be. CSC Updates on European Affairs are also available on the CEC website at: <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/EuropeUpdates.shtml>