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CSC Update on European Affairs

TOPICS COVERED:

European Council of 17 June; Europe 2020 Strategy; Belgian EU Presidency; Transparency; CSC Strategy on Education; 8th ECEN Assembly; Biodiversity; CEC-CLAI dialogue on globalisation; EU Charter for Fundamental Rights; new EU Institute for Gender Equality; Fundamental Rights Agency; Human Rights Education; Report of the first CALL conference; Council of Europe and civil dialogue; staff news; upcoming events.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

EU integration moves forward with an agreement on more economic governance

The heads of states and governments gathered for a one-day Summit on 17 June to discuss Europe's mid-term and long-term economic and financial development. This time, after many crisis meetings, the European Council was able to focus more on the mid-term developments. The leaders of the EU Member States agreed on the need to reform the EU's system of economic governance and to further regulate financial services. The Summit agreed on closer coordination of national budgets from 2011 onwards. Contrary to expectations, the Summit also managed to reach an agreement on the publication of bank stress tests. In addition, the meeting took a decision on the establishment of a system of levies and taxes on financial institutions and on the introduction of competitiveness scoreboards. With regard to long-term perspectives, the meeting adopted the Europe 2020 Strategy. The Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC of CEC) has prepared a Briefing paper on the Strategy (attached to this Europe Update).

Besides the economic questions, the European Council, *inter alia*, opened the membership negotiations with Iceland and reaffirmed the Member States' commitment to meeting the Millennium Development Goals by the 2015 deadline. On the contrary, ambitions were not high in terms of fighting climate change. The European Council postponed the issue of its concrete future commitment to the autumn.

Read the Conclusions of the European Council of 17 June at:

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/115346.pdf

Belgium takes over the EU Presidency

In the midst of its political crisis, Belgium takes over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 1 July 2010. Under the slogan "Europe in Action", Belgium aims to foster sustained and sustainable growth; to promote social cohesion and the transition to a low-carbon economy; to take forward EU policies on justice, home affairs, asylum and migration; and to consolidate the EU's role as a force for global peace and security.

Programme of the Belgian EU Presidency:

http://www.eutrio.be/files/bveu/media/source1854/Programme_EN.pdf

TRANSPARENCY

Churches discuss the Register of Interest Representatives with Commissioner Šefčovič

In 2006, the European Commission organized a broad public consultation with a view to creating a more structured framework for the activities of lobbyists and to improve the Commission's minimum standards for consultation. The process to increase transparency was (is) called the European Transparency Initiative (ETI) and led to the launch of a new register for interest representatives in spring 2008 replacing the old CONECCS database (see Europe Updates N° 8 and 17).

Whereas churches have supported the aim of bringing more transparency to the legislative and policy-making process as an important element of the functioning of a democratic society transparency, they have shun the notions of "lobbyists" and its synonym "interest representatives", which to their mind give a distorted impression on the churches' engagement with the European Union. For these reasons, hardly any church has registered in the new database. That was the case with the old database.

After last year's developments (the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the change of the European Commission), the discussion on this topic has now resumed. On 27 May 2010, the representatives of CSC and of the Commission of Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) together with representatives of the Evangelical Church in Germany and the German Bishops' Conference - Germans being particularly concerned about the matter - met with Maroš Šefčovič, the Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Inter-Institutional Relations and Administration. As a follow-up to a fruitful meeting, they have now sent a joint letter to the Commissioner with more concrete proposals.

In their letter, the churches ask for the naming of this registration system to take fully into account the fact that the groups listed within it are inhomogeneous, that they are very different in nature and have distinct (legal) grounds underpinning their interaction with the EU Institutions. For example, whereas Article 11, § 2 TEU refers to a dialogue between the EU and civil society, Article 17, § 3 TFEU foresees a specific dialogue between the Union's Institutions and churches and religious communities. The churches hope that the distinction between the different groups would be made visible even if the groups were positioned on the same level. The churches also express their hope that – as the discussion is still going on - the current lack of registration of churches in the new register would not be held to their disadvantage.

Read more on ETI at: <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency>

EDUCATION

CSC issues a Strategy on Education

In our previous Europe Update in early June we mentioned that the CSC Plenary in Haguenau on 28 May – 1 June, had adopted a CSC Strategy on Education. The Strategy is now available on the CSC website at: <http://csc.ceceurope.org/issues/education/>. The Education Strategy, prepared by a brainstorming group consisting of representatives of CEC Member Churches, is a response to a request by the Plenary in Prague 2008 to make education a CSC priority for the years to come. The Strategy will be turned into practise by a working group on education which will be set up in the autumn and work until the next CEC General Assembly in 2013.

The focus of the work about the Strategy will be twofold. First, it will relate to the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020) of the European Union. Here, the working group will develop a tool through which Member Churches can monitor, influence (and be part of) the implementation of ET 2020 on the national level. The group will also write a statement which reflects on the quality in education. Secondly, it will aim at promoting education for democratic citizenship. Churches' contributions in this area are to be explored in a Conference in 2011. An on-line library on citizenship education shall be realised in the education section of the CSC website.

For more information visit the CSC website or contact Executive Secretary Carla Maurer (carla.maurer@cec-kek.fr).

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

ECEN Assembly: Meat consumption is bad for the environment

The European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) held its 8th Assembly on 9-13 June in the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic. Some 80 participants from 23 countries discussed the theme "Our daily bread – living in a time of climate change". According to the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) meat consumption largely contributes to global greenhouse gas emissions. Intensive industrial cattle breeding as well as mass deforestation for large soy plantations providing cattle feed, are the main causes. Bringing down meat consumption is therefore an important tool in combating climate change. The ECEN Assembly took this to heart by having mainly vegetarian catering during the conference.

Quaker and leading Scottish theologian, Alastair McIntosh, spoke about the need for spirituality in order to bring about lasting changes. Metropolitan Krystof, the head of the Orthodox Church in the Czech Lands and Slovakia, in his contribution pointed out the need for strong links between theology and care for creation. Libor Ambrozek, former minister of environment in the Czech Government underlined the role churches play as a part of civil society in the dialogue with public authorities. The plea of keynote speakers to include depth-psychology and spirituality in creation theology was taken up by ECEN's working group on theology. It will continue its work focusing on education of clergy, seminarians, teachers and pastoral workers. Other working groups on food,

eco-management and lifestyle transition looked into the practicalities of helping mitigate climate change. New bilateral partnerships were formed between church organisations with different levels of experience throughout Europe. In the Czech Republic, church environmental work has developed rapidly over the past few years, as presentations demonstrated.

The Assembly sent a letter (attached to this Europe Update) with a prayer to the European churches which among others called for the strengthening of common advocacy work on environmental issues. ECEN is an instrument of CEC for addressing the relationship to nature and the environment from the perspective of Christian theology and Christian way of life.

For more information about the Assembly see: www.ecen.org

European Governments are urged to improve the protection of biodiversity

The INGO Conference, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities have issued a joint Declaration "Working together for Biodiversity, Protection of Natural Areas and the Fight against Climate Change" to the Governments of the CoE Member States. The governments are invited "to acknowledge that the right to a healthy environment is an integral part of human rights..." and "to frame and provide appropriate funding for policies and practical measures to protect and improve biodiversity...". The Declaration urges to improve the state of biodiversity and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by promoting an adapted lifestyle and a change of policies. CEC Member Churches are invited to draw on this Declaration in the dialogue with the national and regional governments on environmental issues.

The Declaration is available online (in English and French) at:

<http://www.coe.int/t/congress/files/themes/biodiversity/20100428-joint-declaration.pdf>

GLOBALISATION

Threats and challenges of globalisation – Churches in Europe and Latin America in dialogue

The dialogue between CEC and the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) on the impacts of globalisation has now resulted in a joint publication entitled "Threats and challenges of globalisation – Churches in Europe and Latin America in dialogue." On the CEC side, the document was adopted by the CSC Plenary on 1 June. On the CLAI side, the adoption process is expected to be finalised in the coming weeks. As soon as the text gets the green light from both sides, it will be submitted as a joint CEC-CLAI document to the churches on both continents as well as a contribution to the global ecumenical debate.

The document clarifies similarities and differences between the impacts of globalisation on the two continents and discusses issues such as the state - market relation, the primacy of politics, alternative models of economy, economies and societies in transition, and the role of the churches in regional integration processes. The document does not seek to offer a final word on these topics but rather maps the positions of both sides and creates a framework for pursuing the dialogue between churches of both continents, as well as within the European churches.

The dialogue between the two continents was initiated shortly after the WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre in 2006. It had become clear that the differences in the way the impacts of globalisation were experienced in the everyday life of people around the globe, had also led to not so positive perceptions of the "industrialised (globalising) West" in the developing countries. The 3rd EEA in Sibiu also confirmed that there was a need to address the European responsibility for ecological justice and fair shaping of globalisation and for doing so in co-operation with the churches of other continents.

The dialogue process took off last year with two meetings: one in Buenos Aires and one in Oslo (see Europe Updates N° 29 and 26). Beyond the issue of globalisation, the objective of the dialogue was to contribute to overcoming prejudices and to build confidence between churches from both continents. That happened. The two organisations have grown closer. The next stage of the process will be the joint CEC–WCC Consultation on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Europe, which will take place in Budapest in November 2010.

HUMAN RIGHTS

European Commission plans a Strategy on Human Rights

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union became legally binding with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December last year. The European Commission has now announced that it will present a communication later this year on the EU fundamental rights policy with a strategy for the Charter's enforcement. Talking to the European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, the EU Commissioner responsible for Human Rights, Viviane Reding described the Charter as the "compass for the EU policies".

The speech of Commissioner and Vice-President Viviane Reding:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/10/324&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

European Institute for Gender Equality opened in Vilnius

The new European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) was inaugurated in Vilnius (Lithuania) in June. The aim of this Institute is to promote and assist the realization of gender equality in the European Union. Learn more about the Institute at <http://www.eige.europa.eu/>.

News from the EU Fundamental Rights Platform

The 3rd meeting of the Fundamental Rights Platform of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (EU FRA) on 15-16 April looked at the human rights dimension of poverty, the implications of the Lisbon Treaty for the protection of fundamental rights, and the Agency's Work Programme 2012. It also elected a new 9-member Advisory Panel. During the last term, churches had been represented by CSC Human Rights Secretary Elizabeta Kitanovic. This time around Rev. Peter Ciaccio from the Waldensian Church in Italy stood as one of the 47 eligible candidates (there were 59 nominations) and came close to making it. The total number of organisations entitled to vote was 129.

Read more about the Fundamental Rights Platform and the Advisory Panel at:

http://194.30.12.221/fraWebsite/partners_networks/fundamental_rights_platform_frp/fundamental_rights_platform_frp_en.htm

New initiatives on human rights education

The EU FRA has created the FRA InfoBase which provides country-by-country information on developments in the area of fundamental rights as well as a compilation of international, EU-and national constitutional law relevant for the EU Fundamental Rights Charter articles. This might be of interest for churches in their human rights work.

Visit the InfoBase at:

http://infoportal.fra.europa.eu/InfoPortal/infobaseFrontEndCountryHome.do?btnCountryLinkHome_1.

The EU FRA and the Council of Europe have joined forces to train journalists to "Speak out against discrimination". The first training will take place in Coimbra (Portugal) from 30 August – 3 September 2010.

For more information, please visit:

http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/news_and_events/infocus10_1406_en.htm.

EMPLOYMENT

Churches launch CALL network for a just economy in Europe

The report of the first meeting of the new Christian Employment and Economy Network, Church Action on Labour and Life (CALL), held in Brussels on 28-30 April, is now available at:

<http://csc.ceceurope.org/issues/social-and-economic-issues/call-network/>

CIVIL DIALOGUE

Financial crisis hits the Council of Europe work with civil society

The Council of Europe (CoE) is going through a time of change. The Conference of the International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO), in which CSC of CEC plays an active role, will be massively affected by the foreseen financial restrictions. It has been proposed that a quarter of the CoE's global budget cut (0.89% reduction in 2011) will fall on the INGO budget, which will almost halve it (from 1.125.900 € in 2010 to 622.000 € in 2011). Those plans sparked off harsh criticism among the INGO Conference, arguing that civil society provides a remarkable contribution to the work of the CoE and that it is an important link between the Institution and the grassroots' realities. The CoE has been a pioneer in involving the civil society structurally in its work. CEC is one of the 366 INGOs with participative status at the CoE.

STAFF NEWS

CSC thanks Rev. Dr. Heidtmann for his excellent work

After more than 6 years of excellent service at CSC, Rev. Dr. Dieter Heidtmann and his family are heading towards new challenges. On 1 September, Dieter Heidtmann will start his new job as

Director of Studies for Economic Policies and Ethics in the Protestant Academy of Bad Boll. During his term as an Executive Secretary at CSC, Dieter Heidtmann has promoted social progress, employment and sustainable economic policies. Besides his duties within CSC, he served the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) in various areas of work. The Director of CSC, Rev. Rüdiger Noll, and the CPCE General Secretary, Bishop Michael Bünker, pay particular tribute to Dieter Heidtmann's role in strengthening the common voice of the churches *vis-à-vis* the European Institutions and to his decisive contribution to the successful co-operation between CPCE and CSC in the field of social ethics. According to Rev. Serge Fornerod, the Moderator of CSC, Dieter Heidtmann is "a man of initiatives" and that has been very valuable for both CSC and CPCE. "When Dieter Heidtmann is around, the solution of the problem is never far away," he writes. Dieter Heidtmann was seconded to CSC by CPCE and by his home church the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Württemberg.

Former CEC staff Irja Askola elected Bishop of Helsinki

Former CEC staff member, Irja Askola, has been elected Bishop of Helsinki of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland. Irja Askola is the first ever female bishop in Finland.

Read the related CEC Press Release at:

http://www.ceceurope.org/news-and-media/news/?tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=204&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=22&cHash=03521f1387

UPCOMING EVENTS

Planned CSC events in 2010

A Dialogue Seminar on the social dimension (poverty and social exclusion) of the Europe 2020 Strategy is scheduled for 9 July. As usual, the Dialogue Seminar is a joint endeavour of CSC, COMECE and the European Commission. (For more information, contact Rev. Dr. Dieter Heidtmann, dht@cec-kek.be). CSC is also planning to organise a consultation on poverty at the end of September in Brussels. That event is part of the co-operation framework between CSC, Caritas Europa, COMECE and Eurodiaconia during the European Year on Poverty (contact: dht@cec-kek.be).

Furthermore, CSC is involved in the organisation of the next event of the Wealth, Poverty and Ecology process of the WCC. The consultation, due to take place in Budapest (Hungary) on 8-12 November, will address three main topics: wealth and poverty in Europe, with focus on Central and Eastern Europe; the challenge of low carbon economy and economy of sufficiency; and the strengthening of participatory governance. The conference will offer an exciting possibility for a direct exchange between delegates from Europe and ecumenical partner organisations from other continents. The meeting is targeted at experts involved in churches' work in the addressed area of concern (contact Rev. Dr. Peter Pavlovic; ppt@cec-kek.be).

Church and Society Commission

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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://csc.ceceurope.org/news/europe-updates/>

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