



*CALL*

EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN  
EMPLOYMENT AND  
ECONOMY NETWORK

CHURCH  
ACTION on  
LABOUR and  
LIFE



## Kirchlicher Herausgeberkreis Jahrbuch Gerechtigkeit

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*Lecture in the European Parliament, Brussels, 29.04.2010*

### **Combating poverty in Europe under the conditions of the global market What the Church expects from and can contribute to the new enterprise of the European Union**

The working programme of the EU for “the European Year 2010 for the Combating of Poverty and Social Exclusion” has one aim above all: through the expansion of awareness and public information to set in motion a sustained process combating poverty through the political programmes of the EU and the member states. As churches in Europe we stand in the forefront of the struggle against poverty and social exclusion and share the four main aims of the European Year 2010:

- Recognition of the fundamental right of those affected by poverty and social exclusion to live in dignity and play an equal and recognised role in society
- Shared responsibility and participation, advancing of social integration
- Furthering of stronger social cohesion by raising public sensitivity
- Strengthening of engagement and directed action by the EU and its member states on all levels of operation

In my following remarks I shall develop four theses:

1. Poverty and social exclusion constitute a special challenge to a Europe that is growing together
2. The poor and excluded are hindered actors – fair sharing demands equal participation
3. Lasting overcoming of poverty and exclusion in Europe requires further evolution of the social market economy
4. The churches in Europe are strong and reliable partners in the struggle against poverty and social exclusion

## **1. Poverty and social exclusion constitute a special challenge to a Europe that is growing together**

### **1.1 As a global and internal European challenge**

The European Union is built upon values which are to be realised both internally and externally. Externally the EU is faced with the question of its political credibility in regard to the Millennium Development Goals of halving absolute poverty worldwide by 2015: without a fundamental change of course the EU will not be able to keep the promise it gave in 2000. Internally, especially in Western Europe, there is a temptation to regard poverty in Europe as minimal in comparison to the experiences of absolute poverty in other parts of the world. However: "What embitters poor people is not primarily a lack of money or social provision, but a lack of security and political influence. Being dependent, pushed around, having no voice, that is how the experience of poverty often distils out. Lack of means makes vulnerable,"<sup>1</sup> – and that applies in the settings of Africa, Latin America and Asia just as much as with us in Europe.

### **1.2 In the present Economic Crisis**

The global financial and economic crisis sharpens poverty, unemployment and social exclusion worldwide just as among us in Europe. Precarious work situations, the divisions between rich and poor within the European societies will increase. At the same time the crisis has massively restricted the social-political freedom of manoeuvre of the European states: all the major industrial nations in Europe have taken on enormous debts to cope with the crisis. After the crisis the European countries will emerge weaker on their common international field of action as on their national, regional and local fields. It is probable that in all social sectors radical market instruments will take up more room than before – now, however, after the collapse of Neoliberalism, these will no longer be justified on grounds of economic theory but as allegedly necessary in the absence of any alternative.

### **1.3 In the new East-West Divide in Europe**

The catastrophic social impact of the global financial and economic crisis even in wealthy Europe should not at the same time distract our attention from the new, poverty-intensifying social division of the expanded EU into a generally rich western and a generally poor eastern area. That is why it is so important for our church as co-publisher that the *Yearbook of Justice IV*. "Poor rich Europe" presented at this conference offers impulses for overcoming the new East-West division in Europe. Sustainable combating of poverty and social exclusion in Europe demands the further development of the social integration of the European Union. This demands, beyond necessary programmes and projects in particular sectors, that we drive forward the further evolution of the social market economy into a socially, ecologically and globally committed market economy in Europe.

### **1.4 The Crisis as Opportunity**

At the same time there also exists today a special opportunity to combat poverty in Europe:

For the first time fundamental rights have been anchored by the Treaty of Lisbon in European Primary Law with the commitment of the EU to ensure "a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources" (Article 34 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights). With the Treaty of Lisbon the commitment of the EU to combating poverty and social exclusion acquires a high priority. For there it says: The EU "shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, and shall promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Zukunftsfähiges Deutschland in einer globalisierten Welt (ed. BUND, Brot für die Welt, Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst), Frankfurt 2008, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> Treaty on the European Union (Lisbon Treaty), art. 2, par. 3.

## **2. The poor and excluded are hindered actors – fair sharing demands equal participation**

The poor are not in the first instance victims, but hindered actors, citizens who must live their lives without rights, without possessions, without titles to property and without political influence. Poverty does not come from a lack of money but from a deficit in possibilities for self-determination and cooperation in the shaping of society, from a deficit in power. That is why the strategy for combating poverty cannot primarily consist in economic growth. It must be a fundamental rights strategy aiming for more rights and self-determination for the poor. At our most recent international conference against child poverty experts from Scotland and the Philippines, Brazil and the USA, Tanzania and Hungary unanimously confirmed: As long as we always still see the poor as part of the problem and not as part of the answer, our attempts to combat poverty will remain incomplete, if not indeed useless.

We therefore demand as churches a fundamental change of perspective which sees society from the angle of the basic needs of the poor, in particular of poor children.

In its struggle against poverty one sentence has become central for the Church of Scotland:

**Nothing about us - without us - is for us!**

In the “perspective of a Christian ethic all actions and decisions in society, politics and economics must be measured against the question of how far they affect the poor, assist them and empower them for responsible action of their own. Here the biblical option for the poor aims to overcome exclusions and engage all in the life of society.”<sup>3</sup> Fair sharing demands equal participation. Just participation combines together fairness in distribution and empowering; in this sense evangelical ethics requires “for all people access to the essential goods of society, elementary social security and qualification of all for the sphere of social exchange.”<sup>4</sup>

## **3. Lasting overcoming of poverty and exclusion in Europe requires further evolution of the social market economy**

The EU President José Manuel Barroso has given pregnant expression to the foundational significance of values for the EU:

“The crisis that we face is not just a financial or an economic crisis. It is also a crisis for the values of our societies. ... For Europe, this is a moment of truth.”<sup>5</sup>

For this reason the CEC Commission on Church and Society in its analysis of the ethical dimension of the “EU 2020” Strategy recommends as a fourth key priority that the EU should “implement fundamental rights and values in a sustainable social market economy”.

The Protestant Church of Westphalia has now given a new impulse to this necessary debate in our society as in Europe with its study:

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<sup>3</sup> Für eine Zukunft in Solidarität und Gerechtigkeit. Das Wirtschafts- und Sozialwort der DBK und des Rates der EKD, Hanover/Bonn 1997, No. 107.

<sup>4</sup> Gerechte Teilhabe. Befähigung zu Eigenverantwortung und Solidarität. Eine Denkschrift des Rates der EKD zur Armut in Deutschland, Gütersloh 2006, No. 63.

<sup>5</sup> José Manuel Barroso. Political Guidelines for the next Commission. Brussels, September 2009, p. 1,

[http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_barroso/president/pdf/press\\_20090903\\_EN.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/pdf/press_20090903_EN.pdf).

*“Remodelling the Social Market Economy from an ethical standpoint”.*

For reasons of time I cannot go into detail in this introductory contribution. The study is available for you in German and English. Its central thesis runs:

If the social market economy developed in European traditions is ethically further reflected upon in the context of globalisation,

- The market economy can and must be socially and culturally embedded
- Competition is to be pursued ecologically and socially
- The primacy of politics must be globally strengthened.

#### **4. The churches in Europe are solid and reliable partners in the struggle against poverty and social exclusion**

When in the 2020 process the EU reflects on a European social platform, it is important that not only states but also Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and churches are represented. As churches we cannot be content with merely symbolic token politics.

The churches dispose of the largest and densest basis network in Europe and across the world. They are present locally, there where the poor live, there too where the state cannot be present. The churches are the largest non-state providers of health, education and social services for the poor – close to the people on the basis of their Christian view of humanity, not profit-oriented. At the same time they are advocates for the poor, give a voice to those whose voice is not heard.

- as in the framework of the child poverty campaign of our Protestant Church in Westphalia (give a graphic example ...)
- as on the European level in the joint position paper from Caritas Europe, COMECE and the umbrella diaconal association Eurodiaconia on the struggle against poverty and exclusion
- as in cooperation on the Justice Yearbook “Poor Rich Europe” towards overcoming the division between East and West.

The initiative to set up the network “Church Action on Labour and Life” (CALL) comes at the right time. The European Christian Network for Employment and Economy shows: As churches in Europe we are ready to contribute our experience and competence, our national and international professional institutions and networks in the struggle of the EU against poverty and social exclusion.

As part of the one world-wide ecumenical community of churches we recognise and face local challenges in their global context as well: in world-wide networking with our ecumenical partners locally and through the churches’ relief and development services – in transconfessional and multinational ecumenical cooperation.

In order that the poor and excluded in Europe and across the world should not any longer remain hindered actors we struggle at their side for fair sharing and equal participation.

In order that poverty and social exclusion can be enduringly overcome in times of globalisation we demand the further evolution of the social market economy in Europe and offer further-reaching impulses for it.

Not because we have sought this out for ourselves. Rather because God wills that all people have life. And that they have it in its fullness.

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This is how we as churches are solid and reliable partners for the European Union in its struggle against poverty and social exclusion.