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## Poverty Hurts Your Soul

### The Contribution of the European Churches to the European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion

#### 1. The European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (EY2010)

79 million people in the EU – or 16% of the population – currently live at risk of poverty (Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2009). The percentage of people living at the risk of poverty in Europe outside the EU is even higher. Poverty and social exclusion mean deprivation of basic human needs such as food, clean water, access to social services and healthcare, clothing or shelter because of a lack of resources. It means deprivation of equal opportunities in the education system and (subsequently) on the job market. It significantly reduces the opportunity to participate in social life.

The European Commission has designated 2010 as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. The European Year 2010 intends to raise public awareness of the way poverty continues to blight the daily lives of so many Europeans. The € 26 million campaign aims to reaffirm the EU's commitment to making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010.

#### The European Year has four specific objectives:

- Recognition of the right of people in poverty and social exclusion to live in dignity and to play a full part in society;
- An increase in the public ownership of social inclusion policies, emphasising everyone's responsibility in tackling poverty and marginalisation;
- A more cohesive society, where no one doubts that society as a whole benefits from the eradication of poverty;
- Commitment of all actors, because real progress requires a long-term effort that involves all levels of governance.

#### The European Year shall focus on 5 themes:

- Child poverty and the intergenerational transmission of poverty;
- An inclusive labour market;
- Lack of access to education and training;
- Gender dimension of poverty;
- Access to basic services.

The 2010 European Year will coincide with the conclusion of the EU's ten-year strategy for growth and jobs (Lisbon strategy). The actions undertaken during this European Year will

reaffirm the initial political commitment of the EU at the start of the Lisbon strategy, in 2000, to making “a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty” by 2010.

### **Key events at European level:**

- Opening and closing conferences organised under the auspices of the respective EU presidencies, i.e. the Spanish in the first semester 2010 and the Belgian in the second semester 2010.
- Two "Focus Weeks", the one in Spring, around the date of the annual meeting of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion (17-30 May 2010) and the other one in October, around the celebration of the International Day against Poverty on 17<sup>th</sup> October (11-24 October 2010).
- The Member States have been asked to designate National Implementing Bodies, who will be in charge of elaborating and implementing the EY2010 activities at national level.

### **2. Dimensions of poverty from a Christian perspective:**

In Christian understanding, poverty and social exclusion are multi-dimensional phenomena not only based on economic factors, but ones which affect all dimensions of life, and not only the individual, but also the community. Some of the aspects are listed below:

#### *Human Dignity*

In Christian understanding, poverty and social exclusion are understood as a failure to uphold basic human rights (cf. Amos 2,6f; 4,1). The alleviation of poverty was from the beginning an essential part of the proclamation of the Gospel “to preach good news to the poor ..., to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ...” (Luke 4,18). Over the centuries churches therefore engaged in combating poverty and social exclusion.

#### *Work and Dignity*

A high level of employment and social security are key elements to fully participate in society and to combat poverty and social exclusion. In Christian understanding, work is not just a productive factor but a central element of human dignity and of participation in social life. Thus it must always be organised and carried out with full respect toward human dignity and must serve the common good. Christian churches are concerned about the growing number of people working in precarious working conditions and about the increasing phenomenon of “working poor”.

#### *A Privileged Option for the Poor*

The practice of solidarity is an essential element of Christian faith. Christian churches are wedded to a “privileged option for the poor”. They started developing and providing social services according to the needs of society long before the welfare state assumed its responsibility. Today, churches in Europe and their specialised ministries provide social services in all European countries. They are based at grassroots level, close to the people and very often the places to go for those who are falling through the safety nets of the social protection systems. In so doing, churches and diaconal organisations are bridge-builders for a socially cohesive society for all.

#### *Child poverty*

Poverty is still inherited; nothing influences the future of children so much as their level of social deprivation. Family policy, social policy and education policy in Europe do not sufficiently ensure that the social and/or ethnic origin of a child does not determine its future. Particular attention needs to be paid to supporting families with children, particularly single-parent families, as well as children with a migrant or ethnic minority background, in order to tackle the higher incidence of poverty found there.

### *Poverty of Women*

Poverty has an important gender dimension. Statistics show that employment, work and pay are still not distributed equally in all European countries. The factors that make women poorer than men are complex. Because of their caring responsibilities, many women living on their own cannot undertake paid work to improve their financial position and do not move beyond 'survival' mode. Gender stereotyping plays a role in restricting the choices of occupation made by women and men, and many women end up in low-paid employment based on stereotypical female roles. This affects women's chances of asset growth, particularly if they are living on their own or if their status is dependent on the husband (e.g. in the case of many migrant women).

### *Poverty of Migrants*

Migration is posing challenges to societies, political institutions and churches. At the same time, migration offers perspectives for living in diversity, enrichment for personal life as well as for the societies. The biblical tradition obliges and invites everyone to "welcome the stranger". The churches in Europe are particularly concerned about the need to properly address basic rights for migrants to prevent social exclusion. The legal status of migrants is still the subject of hugely diverse national legislation. This leads to enormous problems, among which trafficking and new forms of slavery are only the most dramatic.

### *Personal Relations*

For many poor people in Europe personal relations are often the strongest and most important assets they have, with dependence on families and social networks (among them parishes) standing out as crucial in combating the isolation they experience. These assets are really positive features in their lives, and an important element in their coping strategies with poverty and social exclusion.

### *Participation*

Christian social teaching does recognise differences between people, including differences in regard to their abilities, with some able to achieve more than others. But it does not accept a society in which individuals no longer benefit from equal participation and where people, despite all efforts, suffer from material poverty. From the viewpoint of Christian tradition, every person should have the opportunity to contribute to society as a whole. Whenever the constraints are too great, it is the duty of society as a whole to enable them to live a life in dignity.

### *Values*

Social cohesion in society relies on firm moral foundations that keep the society together. A social and sustainable economic system has to find the right balance between freedom and responsibility. Europe has to meet the challenge to shape its economic and social systems according to its fundamental values, respecting ethical principles and promoting high social and environmental standards not only inside Europe but worldwide.

### *Spirituality*

Poverty has an important spiritual dimension of care for each other. Spiritual poverty means to experience unfulfilled needs, emotional injuries and hurts at the hands of others, or to hurt others with our own immaturities and misdoings. It describes an imbalance between self interest and the interest of others. The Gospel expresses a special concern for these people: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven".

## **3. Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in Times of an Economic Crisis and in a Global Perspective**

In April 2009 representatives of European churches met in Brussels and Mechelen at a conference on "Shaping European economic and social policies in times of uncertainty". The conference was organised by the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches. One result of the Conference was an open letter to the presidents of the

EU institutions, which stated: *“We are convinced that the current crisis is much more profound than the analysis of the EU institutions has suggested so far. The crisis calls into question a number of assumptions, which have underpinned the EU’s economic policies over the last decades, such as deregulation, the primacy of economic criteria in all areas of life as well as an overemphasis on profit and growth. The current crisis is to a large extent a crisis of trust towards the financial and political institutions and towards the system which provoked it. The crisis has an important ethical dimension: Our societies are suffering from a lifestyle which is focusing on individual profit, consumption and greed rather than taking responsibility for the common good, the well-being and the future for all people and for the world we are living in”.*

Poverty and social exclusion have to be seen in the global context. In cooperation with the World Council of Churches (WCC) churches in Europe through the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and its Church and Society Commission (CSC) are involved in a global project on “Poverty, Wealth and Ecology”. In 2010 this project is focusing on the situation in Europe. The joint work under this particular heading will focus on the links between poverty, wealth creation and ecology and in particular on questions like: to what extent are methods and structures of wealth creation responsible for poverty? To what extent is creation of wealth leading to violence and ecological destruction etc.? Poverty and wealth in Europe have to be seen also in relation to the situation in other continents.

#### **4. A Call for a change**

A just and inclusive society must enable as many people as possible to recognise their individual talents, to develop them and to use them productively for themselves and for others. A just society thus invests as much as possible in extending people’s ability to organise their own lives and to enhance its dimensions of social concern and economic activity for all. Such a society is able to support its people in using their individual talents and abilities, to be as self-sufficient as possible in earning their own living, while being supportive of others.

The Open Letter to the EU Presidents expresses the challenges for the forthcoming years as follows:

*“Change would mean to translate EU’s values more strongly into economic as well as social and environmental policies. The Lisbon Treaty sets out the EU’s value basis as ‘respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, ...justice, solidarity and equality between women and men’ (Art. 2). It describes full employment and social progress, a high level of protection and the improvement of the quality of the environment as essential elements of a ‘highly competitive social market economy’ (Art. 3). A social and ecological assessment of all measures taken by the European Union and its Member States could therefore ensure a sustainable response to the economic crisis.*

*“Change would mean to substantially revise the Lisbon strategy, which was developed when a lightly regulated market economy appeared to be flourishing. It now becomes evident that the EU’s strategy for ‘growth and jobs’ does not provide appropriate instruments for economic recovery. EU’s economic forecast shows that Member States with an elaborate social protection system are also economically significantly better placed in meeting the challenges of the current crisis. We ask EU’s Member States to take concrete steps in view of creating a mutually supportive interaction between the economic, employment, social and environmental policies. In order to achieve the goal of a European knowledge-based and competitive economy, it is indispensable to invest more in people: in education, professional training, life-long-learning, innovation and research. A high-quality education begins in early childhood and needs support from a well operating social system.*

*“Change would mean to significantly reduce the level of unemployment in the European Union. We are concerned about the increasing segmentation of the labour market, with more and more precarious employment situations and the growing marginalisation of specific groups such as long term unemployed, less skilled people, people with disabilities, or people with a migration*

*background. The current situation provides a fundamental challenge to the functioning of the social systems. In Christian understanding, work is not just a productive factor but also a central element of human personality and of participation in society. In the current crisis learning systems must be accessible and affordable for all members of a society irrespective of the contractual form of employment. Innovative arrangements providing for transitions between jobs without a break in employment in some EU Member States provide promising experience to avoid the loss of work and income.*

*“Change would mean to ensure all people in Europe are enabled to live a dignified life, particularly through the sustainable provision of quality social and health services, essential to ensure people are in a position to take up opportunities. A close cooperation of European institutions, Member States and civil society organisations can provide for a reliable operating environment that enables providers to provide quality integrated services that meet differing needs. EU funding should be used more effectively to reach the most vulnerable. Poverty and social exclusion are often perceived as urban problems. We wonder whether the rural areas in Europe are sufficiently taken into account”.*

## **5. Strategic objectives**

- The contribution of the European Churches to the European Year 2010 for combating poverty and social exclusion shall encourage the European institutions, EU Member States and other stakeholders to come to a more holistic understanding of the reasons which lead to poverty and social exclusion, as well as of the manifold impact of poverty and social exclusion not only on the people affected but on the whole society.
- The contribution of the Churches shall promote the Christian voice in the discussions on the follow-up of the Lisbon Strategy and in the EU's attempt to come to a more innovative, more social and more sustainable economic strategy.
- The contribution of the Churches shall contribute to awareness-raising and education on social and economic questions among CEC's member churches and associated organisations.
- The contribution of the Churches shall contribute to the dialogue with other groups in civil society, e.g. trade unions and employer's organisations.

## **6. Activities**

The activities on the revision of the Lisbon Strategy and in the area of employment shall be organised by the CALL Network, a Christian employment and economy network on CHURCH ACTION ON LABOUR AND LIVE. The activities to promote a holistic understanding of poverty and social exclusion shall be organised in a joint project with Caritas Europa, Comece and Eurodiaconia.

### **Key activities:**

- Development of a joint contribution of the European Churches for the new “EU 2020” strategy, including:
  - Dialogue Seminar on social inclusion and the Lisbon strategy (together with COMECE) in June 2010.
- Co-edition of the “Jahrbuch Gerechtigkeit VI”, focussing on the situation in Central and Eastern Europe 20 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, including:
  - A Conference on 28-30 April 2010 in Brussels focusing on the Christian understanding of poverty and social exclusion. Presentation of the Jahrbuch Gerechtigkeit 2009 to the European Public. The Conference shall be linked with the first CALL Assembly.

- Joint project with Eurodiaconia, Comece and Caritas Europa on the Christian understanding of poverty.
  - Joint position paper with a Christian perspective on poverty and social exclusion.
  - Conference in September 2010 in the European Parliament to promote this Christian perspective.
- Joint project of CEC/CCME Member churches: Migration 2010 - European churches responding to migration 2010.
  - Multiple Events.
- Joint project on “Poverty, Wealth, Ecology” in Europe together with WCC. In 2010 the project will be finalised and its findings presented in a joint publication. Expected events:
  - Conference on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in November 2010, which will be preceded by a preparatory seminar on the same topic in June 2010.
- Conclusion of the project and presentation of the outcomes of the dialogue between churches from Europe and Latin America under the title: Threats and challenges of Globalisation - experience of Europe in discussion with Latin America.
- Participation in the "Focus Weeks" with decentralised local, regional and national activities in CEC's 125 Member Churches (e.g. Finnish Campaign, KDA project, Ökumenischer Kirchentag in Munich).
- A Meeting of the Church & Society Secretaries of CEC's Member Churches in Autumn 2010 focusing on poverty and social exclusion.
- Participation in EU stakeholders' expert group, which shall provide expert advice to the Commission throughout the course of the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the activities undertaken in relation to the European Year 2010.

**The Church and Society Commission (CSC)** is one of the commissions of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). The CSC links CEC's some 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). Its task is to help the churches study church and society questions from a theological social-ethical perspective, especially those with a European dimension, and to represent common positions of the member churches in their relations with political institutions working in Europe.

## 7. Activity Calendar

Date	Activity	Responsible Organisation	Project Partner	Comments
<b>January</b>				
20/01/	World Day of Social Justice			
21/01/	EU EY2010 Opening Conference (Madrid)	EU Presidency		Participation of CSC in the Opening Conference
<b>February</b>				
<b>March</b>				
05/03/	World Women's Day of Prayer (Cameroon: Let Everything That Has Breath Praise God)	World Women's Day of Prayer Organisation		Focus on Gender Aspects of Poverty
08-11/03/	CEC & CCEE Joint Committee on Migration	CEC/CCEE	CCEE CCME	
22-28/03/	Week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling against Racism & Racial Discrimination		CCME	
24-26/03/	ECG Seminar on precarious work		ECG	
<b>April</b>				
04/04/	Eastern (Eastern and Western Tradition)			
28-30/04/	CALL Assembly linked with the "Jahrbuch Gerechtigkeit" Consultation		CSC Jahrbuch Gerechtigkeit	
<b>May</b>				
	Meeting of EU Presidents with Religious Leaders	EU Presidents		
12-16/05/	Ecumenical Church Days in Munich	Ev. Kirchentag/Katholikentag		CSC co-organising the Forum Europa
	Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty	EU Presidency		
17-30/05/	EY 2010 Focus Week	EU Commission		
<b>June</b>				
	Dialogue Seminar on EY2010 and the Revision of Lisbon Strategy	CSC/COMECE		
2-6/06/	World Mission Conference (Edinburgh)			
20/06/	World Refugees Day	CCME		
<b>July</b>				
20-27/07/	"Give Us Today Our Daily Bread" 11 <sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation	LWF		
<b>August</b>				

<b>September</b>				
	Conference on Environmental displacements	CCME Aprodev		
27-30/09/	Tentative dates for the CSC/Caritas Europa/Comece/Eurodiaconia Consultation on Poverty	CSC, Comece, Eurodiaconia, Caritas Europa		
<b>October</b>				
11-24/10/	EY 2010 Focus Week			
13/10/	Tentative Date for a Human Circle around the European institutions	EAPN ETUC		
17/10/	International Day for the Eradication of Poverty			
18/10/	EU Anti-Trafficking Day	CCME		
	Church & Society Secretaries Meeting	CSC		
<b>November</b>				
1-5/11/	Poverty-Wealth-Ecology Europe Region Conference	WCC/CEC		
<b>December</b>				
10/12/	Human Rights Day			
	EY 2010 Closing Conference	EU Commission/EU Presidency		
18/12/	International Migrants Day Closing Conference Migration Year 2010	CCME/CEC		