

TRANSITION FROM THE SOCIETY OF DESTRUCTION TOWARD THE COMMUNITY OF CREATION

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*“I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing:
therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:”*

Deuteronomy 30,19

Introductory remarks

The Lisbon strategy accepted in 2000 an ambitious agenda for the promotion of growth and employment in the European Union. The strategic goals were “to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world”. The strategy was extended in 2001 at the Gothenburg European Council with the goals of environmental protection to promote a sustainable economic and social developmentⁱ. After nearly one decade we can say that the original goals cannot be achieved by 2010. The present crisis gives us the opportunity to stop and to think about our future and opportunities. The President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, saidⁱⁱ at the meeting about the Lisbon strategy in Brussels on 13th March 2009, “Particularly in times of crisis, people need to be able to see where we are going – where we will be when we will come out at the other end of the tunnel?”

Cyclical crises are characteristic in market economies. The current crisis has only caused trouble because of its enormous extent and overall impact on all economic and social sectors and groups. The world’s leading nations and institutions have made remarkable efforts to deal with the problems and we can hope that after several months or a couple of quarters the statistics will show us a more consolidated picture. But the overcoming of the cyclical difficulties cannot solve the basic problems of civilised mankind. There are some fundamental shortages and waste connected with our lifestyle which should be eliminated in order to have a chance to continue our life in a sustainable framework.

The characteristics and consequences of the European population’s lifestyle

The main problem of the European lifestyle is individualisation. The widespread culture of self-realisation is the source of our demographic problems. The low birth rates in Europe are

the first signs that the solidarity between the generations is in danger. The increasing life expectancy and the low birth rate together lead to an ageing population and serious problems in the health care and social security systems.

The consumption and leisure-oriented life-style results in the quantitative aspects of development being overestimated. The population accepts development only if it is characterised by an increase of the GDP per capita figures. The consequences are the exhaustion of natural resources, material and energy-wasting production and distribution technologies and environmental problems and damages beyond the point of no return. The implementation of modern technologies in order to increase productivity causes a permanent shortage of jobs and growing level of employment problems. Unemployment causes not only financial and economic, but also a lot of social problems.

The average living standard of the European population is remarkable in a worldwide comparison but is not equally distributed between the different European countries and regions. There is a big gap between the Western and Eastern, and partially between the Northern and Southern, countries. There are also big differences in the distribution of job opportunities in the European Union. The old and new member states of the European Union are in this regard in just the same situation, but the underdeveloped social security networks make the situation harder for the not employed population in the new member states.

These main problems of the European economic and social system cannot be solved only with a quantitative justification of the Lisbon strategy. It needs a qualitative new approach to the problems. In the search for the fundamental driving forces of future development, it is indispensable to involve civil society, the churches and other religious groups to find new perspectives for the European people and society.

Proposals for the modification of the Lisbon strategy

- Sustainable economic and social development can only be achieved if the existing imbalances of the European economic and social situation are solved. The most important threat is the worsening demographic situation. In order to achieve higher birth rates it is necessary to accept the children's education in the family as a contribution to the maintenance of the social security systems.
- The children's education and the nursing of elderly people should be solved mainly on the basis of solidarity between the generations and promoted also financially by the

social security systems. That would tighten the family interconnections and strengthen the basic values of our society.

- It is necessary to measure not only the quantitative but also the qualitative aspects of economic development. The per capita GDP should be replaced with better statistical indicators like Net Economic Welfare or Human Development Index etc. in order to present changes in quality of life and not only in living standards. The success of the national governments and European institutions should be communicated to the population only by the use of such indices.
- The gap between the quality of life of European citizens should be decreased. It is necessary to find the financial resources, but it cannot only be a simple transfer from the wealthy to the poor countries. The solidarity between European nations can only be based on mutual advantages. A common problem for European societies is the increasing level of unemployment. It is necessary to share the existing job opportunities in a fair way. The Council of the European Union adopted at the end of 2008 an introductory note about the principles of flexicurity – that means about methods of flexible and secure employmentⁱⁱⁱ. The promotion of different forms of part-time or job-sharing activities and other innovative employment methods are very important to ensure existing jobs and to create new working places. But it is also important to create new jobs that are not in connection with consumption activities but which are in sectors where new value is created, like education, health care and environment protection. These jobs help to maintain social capital and to increase the real values and advantages of European society, rather than consuming products and services.

The role of churches and other religious groups in the enhancing of the Lisbon/Gothenburg strategy

The European churches and other religious groups are the most important part of the civil society. Traditional European values were elaborated and maintained by the churches in the last two millennia and therefore they are also nowadays the most influential pressure group for determining the ways for future development. Churches are not interested in designing concrete institutions and development plans for the European Union or the member states. But the members of the churches are active designers and participants to find the most appropriate way for development according to their beliefs. What are the most important values which should be represented in future European development?

- Future European development should be based on the protection of nature and human life in a wider context. All economic and social activities should be subordinated under the protection of life conditions. The goal of the economy is not an endlessly increasing level of consumption but promotion of an appropriate quality of life for a human population.
- The solidarity between the former and future generations and the balance between their interests should be the driving factor of European conflict management.
- European integration is not unification on the basis of uniformity. The main European achievements – which are based on the lessons of a long conflict tradition – are diversity and tolerance. The European population should practice an understanding between different religious, national, linguistic and cultural groups or points of view.

European history is now at a crossroads. The current economic and social crisis can surely be solved with traditional methods and the conditions for quantitative growth can be achieved earlier or later. But this framework cannot modify the longer-term prospects for development. It needs a change of paradigm, which is only possible by the modification of our strategic goals. The churches and their members are confident partners in this process because they have a fundamental commitment to the culture of life.

Notes

ⁱ A sustainable Europe for a better World: A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development, European Commission, COM(2001)264 final

ⁱⁱ http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/pdf/speech_20090313_en.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ The Council of the EU 17047/1/08 REV 1 (en) SOC 776 ECOFIN 606