



Contribution of COMECE and CEC to
Finland's Presidency Programme
“Sustainable Europe – Sustainable Future”

July 2019

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Presidency Priority I. “Common Values and the Rule of Law: Cornerstones of EU Action”	2
A) REDISCOVERING AN EU FOUNDED ON PRINCIPLES	2
B) PLACING FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW AT THE CORE OF EU POLICIES	3
C) FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF (FORB) OUTSIDE THE EU	4
Presidency priority II. “A Competitive and Socially Inclusive EU”	5
A) AN INCLUSIVE GROWTH	5
B) ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE	5
C) THE FUTURE OF WORK	6
D) ADVOCATING FOR SOUND PROTECTION OF PERSONAL DATA AND PRIVACY	7
E) GROWTH AND MIGRATION/ASYLUM	7
Presidency priority III. “Climate Action”: Serving Integral Human Development?	8
A) CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	8
B) PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE AND INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT	9
C) A MIGRATION & ASYLUM PERSPECTIVE ON SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE	10
Presidency priority IV. Comprehensive Security and Migration	11
A) LASTING HUMAN SECURITY & SUSTAINABLE PEACE THROUGH AN INTEGRAL APPROACH	11
B) SECURITY IN THE FUTURE EU MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK	12
C) MIGRATION & ASYLUM: A «FREEDOM, SECURITY AND JUSTICE» APPROACH	12
CONTACTS	14

Introduction

COMECE (Commission of the Episcopates of the European Union) and CEC (Conference of European Churches) welcome the commitment of the Finnish Presidency to actively engage on the **future of Europe**, focusing particularly on effective measures to increase sustainable growth and security as well as mitigate climate change. We call for the announced focus on economic prosperity, safety and sustainability to keep in sight the advancement of the **Common Good**.

Churches and religious communities are not only **universal networks of faith**, they are institutions **deeply rooted in local realities** that **share the concern** for the Common Good of our societies. It has hence become a **fruitful practice, supported by Article 17 TFEU**, for COMECE and CEC, together with national Churches, to meet with the EU Presidency at the beginning of its term.

Moreover, in application of **Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)**, according to which the EU shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with Churches, and in accordance with the relevant practice, **COMECE and CEC are pleased to contribute to the dialogue by presenting the following reactions and proposals that address the Presidency's priorities.**

Presidency Priority I. “Common Values and the Rule of Law: Cornerstones of EU Action”

A) Rediscovering an EU founded on principles

Bearing in mind that the concept of “*values*” implies changes (even radical ones), increasing or decreasing their relevance over time - including depending on the context and circumstances - Churches can be advocates for a **Union rooted in “principles”**. Churches support **principles rooted in human dignity, expressed in fundamental rights, through the Rule of Law**. This to allow integral human development of **persons, families and communities**. The EU has been founded on the idea of sharing some key principles, which are underlined in the first articles of the Treaty of the European Union. However, this ideal has been in recent years **put under increasing pressure**. The impact of economic crises revealed differences in the understanding of social justice and the relationship between economic prosperity and fair sharing; while migration & refugee crises revealed different interpretation and different visions of solidarity in different parts of the Union. Hence, the **danger of populism and political extremism** in the continent reached an unprecedented level.

Common principles in the Union are based more on a horizon which the Union should wish to achieve, rather than a statement of an existing reality. It is, nevertheless, a constant task of the Union not to withdraw from the responsibility of keeping alive tangible aspirations. The ideal of common principles is worthy of highlighting, especially in the moment when critical and far reaching decisions have to be taken.

The Finnish Presidency of the EU Council takes place in a **period of key decision-making for the EU**. Shared principles are crucial to build **trust among partners around the common project**. Within a context still marked by Brexit, **the semester of the Finnish Presidency of the EU Council will also be characterised by political developments** (new President of the European Commission, President of the European Parliament, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, President of the European Central Bank and President of the European Council). The Finnish Presidency will also be the first one to start implementing the new Strategic Agenda for the EU.

In this new configuration, the EU will have to tackle its ambitions of completing the work in the area of migration and asylum, reinforcing the Economic and Monetary Union and the negotiation process leading to the next EU budgetary frame 2020-27.

Churches in Europe are supporting the project of a **Union based on common principles** since the beginning. Churches see this commitment as part of their task to promote human dignity, solidarity, human rights, freedom, justice and sustainability in the public space, both at the European, national and local levels.

The Finnish Presidency will be in the unenviable position of having to **improve the functioning of the EU**, by establishing new bridges among partners, cultures, peoples, translating those principles into laws and those laws into practice. In addition to focusing on economic prosperity and growth, the EU institutions should actively invest in its contribution to **promoting Common Good for all** in Europe.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- We encourage the Finnish Presidency to **re-establish common principles**, including Rule of Law, human dignity, and human rights, all **at the heart of the decision-making process of the Council**, as well as of the daily functioning of the EU administration.
- Support the vision of **a Union as a community of destiny at the service** of the persons and peoples it is made up of.

B) Placing Fundamental Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law at the core of EU policies

The Finnish Presidency of the EU Council is pledging to have thematic discussions on future developments in the field of justice, safeguarding the rule of law, **democracy and human rights**. The **10th anniversary of the [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU](#)** provides the EU with the opportunity to reinvest in its application.

Initiatives by the **European Commission** during the last legislature have constantly focused on the topic of the **Rule of Law**. The **Rule of Law** as a reference point in a rights-based approach has been **raised transversally** (e.g. with regard to [fighting against fake news](#) and disinformation, [EU funding, etc](#)).

The [reform of the EU Transparency Register](#) encountered some obstacles to overcome during the new legislature. Transparency principles are highly regarded when they contribute to a better participation of all citizens in democracy. Transparency should rely on mechanisms proportionate to the type of subjects and actors. The **EU Transparency Register** has been a [constant focus of work](#), including in the context of its ongoing reform.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- We recommend the Finnish Presidency to foster the EU's **application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality**, in order to not prevent citizens from participating in the democratic debate by placing the burden on small and medium-sized actors and the informal sector of societies.
- On the **Rule of Law**, we encourage the EU Presidency to ask for greater **exemplarity from the EU institutions** and to foster the application of **existing tools** rather than a multiplication thereof.
- We recommend that the Finnish Presidency make use of the **10th anniversary of the entry into force of the EU Charter to restate the [universality and inalienability, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of fundamental rights](#)**, inviting **Churches**, as long-standing actors in this field, to bring their **specific contribution**. In a context in which the EU institutions are often accused of applying a “cherry picking”, it should be recalled that establishing a hierarchy between fundamental rights creates the conditions for a collapse of their **entire architecture**.
- Churches encourage the EU Presidency to **relaunch the process placing the EU institutions under the provisions and mechanisms of the European Convention of Human Rights**.
- The EU Presidency is encouraged to confirm the **current Transparency Register system, based on registration for Church representations**, but not for Churches, as it reflects practice and ensures compliance with [Article 17 TFEU](#).

C) Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) outside the EU

Recent reports provide worrying information about the worsening of the religious freedom situation in the world. The EU, through its EEAS and other bodies and entities that work outside the EU such as DG DEVCO or DG NEAR, should pay attention to this factor as it can pave the way for **instability in certain areas of the world**, such as the Middle East and certain parts of the Sahel region.

In particular, the presence of certain **religious minorities** might positively contribute in certain countries towards social stability and openness, while their extinction would harm the process of a full respect of human dignity and fundamental rights for everyone (e.g., Christians in Middle East countries play a leading social role in promoting tolerance, openness and equal citizenship for all. **Christians can also play an important role in terms of prevention of conflicts and reconciliation.**

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Priority international protection status for victims of recognised international crimes on religious grounds**, and support for the creation of mechanisms to prosecute the perpetrators.
- To provide **better information and understanding to the EU decision makers on the situation in countries of concern** or specific cases where FoRB is involved (e.g., religious minorities in Pakistan).
- A more effective use of **Human Rights Dialogues** with third countries to advance in the protection and promotion of freedom of religion.
- Supporting the **collection of evidences** for the prosecution of those responsible of atrocity crimes against religious minorities, and the establishment of **appropriated and specific judicial mechanisms**, where they are missed, with jurisdiction to judge those crimes.
- To make more **robust the position of the EU Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the EU**, as a direct adviser to the EU High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.
- To ensure **that asylum seekers persecuted on religious grounds are provided a fair access to international protection**, without discrimination.

Presidency priority II. “A Competitive and Socially Inclusive EU”

A) An inclusive growth

The achievement of a **stable economic growth** has been a hallmark of EU policies. Pursuing such policies brought **prosperity** to a significant part of European societies. **Growing inequalities** in societies across the continent are linked to an unfair distribution of income and wealth. The threat of poverty is an increasing concern. Inequality in Western countries have reached a level which is hindering economic growth. In order to preserve social cohesion and restore a healthy democracy, economic inequalities have to be tackled. **Certain groups of persons in society are particularly vulnerable, including migrants, the elderly, youth and Roma.** In some contexts, they are even seen as competitors for scarce social benefits.

Most of the EU Member states are experiencing in recent years a period of **economic success**. Unemployment is relatively low, statistical wealth is growing. Nevertheless, Churches are concerned by growing social divisions in European societies, the disappearance of a middle class, the growing gap between rich and poor and the creation of marginalised sections of societies.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Churches are confident that the Finnish Presidency will **make the EU fully play its role at the global level**. Especially by addressing in a transversal and comprehensive way, the economy, climate change, social issues, fair trade and its link with migration, whilst placing the human person at the centre, as the key actor for building **long-standing and sustainable peace**.
- Contribute to a change of mentality concerning EU practices, **avoiding that all activities be treated as market-oriented and economic, especially those regarding Churches and civil society, like humanitarian or educational ones.**

B) Addressing the challenges and opportunities of Artificial Intelligence

A challenge for the EU Presidency will be to implement the Single Market in a way that **digital transition accompanies the ecological transition**. **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** is by nature a cross-cutting reality for which the **EU should take on a stronger role**.

Artificial intelligence centred on persons, families and communities brings many benefits to our societies and economies, e.g. by facilitating healthcare, transport, a more sustainable farming. Innovation within the context of AI can be seen as a radical questioning of the identity and true reality of the human person. Our Churches support the development of innovation of an **Artificial Intelligence rooted in strong legal and ethical principles**, by establishing rules for it to protect and serve the human person.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Monitor the implementation process** of the Communication “Artificial Intelligence for Europe”. The third pillar of “ensuring an appropriate ethical and legal framework” has to be promoted within the principle of the centrality of the human persons and respect those limits.

- Having the **Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI** being published as a “living document”, the Finnish Presidency should establish **broad dialogue practices open to all stakeholders**, so as to deepen the comprehension of the ethical challenges and eventual changes.
- Monitor the implementation process of the **document about policy recommendations for trustworthy AI drafted by the High-Level-Expert Group on AI**.

C) The Future of Work

Articulating the necessary ecological transition of our economies within an accelerating globalisation and technological evolution - in particular digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence - strongly impacts on labour conditions, as well as on our basic understanding of work. Together these changes have triggered innovation and helped to create employment throughout the EU, but have yet come with challenges. Creative and high-skilled employment have been created in particular in Europe’s urban centres, **while routine-task jobs of the middle class are shrinking**, notably in rural areas. Many **young people** escaped unemployment but **cope with unsustainable working conditions**, including short-term contracts, bogus self-employment and other new work forms. Due to the increasing use of mobile devices, people can work anytime, anywhere, leading to an **intensification of work and shrinking space for family life, volunteering and rest periods**.

Public policies focusing on adaptation of people to change in the world of work should make sure that those **policies benefit to all persons**.

Churches would like the Finnish Presidency to **promote decent, sustainable and participative work forms**. **Technological changes should serve the human person not vice versa**.

Churches support a **more holistic approach** that is able to restore the correlation between the environment, the economy, society, culture and people’s everyday life.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- We encourage the Finnish Presidency to **promote the application of the commitments of the UN Sustainable Development Goals** in an interdisciplinary way that profits the integral human development of all the weakest persons in society.
- Our Churches encourage the EU institutions to **rekindle the concept of the [social market economy](#) as enshrined in the European Treaties** and to finally find **new metrics that go beyond the traditional concept of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), achieving long-standing, authentic progress**. The EU Presidency should contribute to transmuting the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) into concrete policy initiatives using all instruments - including legislations, the European Semester, EU cohesion policy and the European social dialogue - and further explore a **European framework for minimum income**.
- We recommend that the Finnish Presidency ensures that the **right to social protection and training** is applicable to certain **online platforms**, notably through the [Directive on Temporary Agency Work](#).
- Churches encourage the Council to support a consistent combination of economic and fiscal policies, ensuring **fair taxation** of digital economy, reaching an agreement on a comprehensive [directive on a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base \(CCCTB\)](#), as well as to conclude the negotiations on a [financial transaction tax](#) under the procedure of enhanced cooperation.

- **Conditions for investment** are necessary to create **sustainable working conditions**. We recommend that the Finnish Presidency fully implement the [*EU Action Plan on Sustainable Finance*](#) with the view to unlock the potential for the creation of sustainable jobs. We encourage an **increase in public and private investment in digital infrastructure in rural areas** and to make better use of digitalisation as a vector for balanced and hence sustainable development in Europe.

D) Advocating for sound protection of personal data and privacy

At the **global level** the European Union is considered to have achieved a **very ambitious legislative framework with the ‘GDPR’**, contributing to the creation of a “**culture of data protection**”. Its **implementation** at the national level has to be carried out in full compliance not only with primary EU law obligations, but also with **international standards and obligations**.

The **Church** is very much **concerned about the protection of personal data of EU citizens and about the right to privacy**. It also recalls that the **implementation** of the relevant EU rules must **comply with other fundamental rights**, such as the right to freedom of expression and information, the right to freedom of religion, to freedom of association, as well as respect for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The **implementation of the GDPR** should fully **involve all actors**, formal and informal, **including Churches/religious ones, together with stakeholders from civil society**. We invite to **tackle the burden placed on these actors in compliance with the principle of proportionality**. In the context of the Rule of Law, **effective remedy** against all decisions taken by any authority should be ensured.
- Concerning the [*ePrivacy Regulation*](#) the Presidency is invited to consider this text as one of the possible instruments to counteract online **child pornography**.
- Furthermore, it is key to underline that reflections on an **ethical approach on the protection of personal data should not water down** or undermine international-level, EU-level and national-level **legal obligations** and standards.

E) Growth and migration/asylum

The so-called **Blue Card Directive** can be seen as a first step to make the EU an attractive place for the talents it needs. In the context of **changing demographic landscapes**, the EU should develop a welcoming environment, able to **attract new talent** while at the same time allowing to make **better use of creativity and capacities of people living in the continent**.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- With regard to the **Blue Card Directive**, **procedures allowing recognition of professional skills and academic qualifications should be simplified**.
- To increase the **efficiency of programmes focused on integration** of migrants and refugees, in particular of medium and low skill workers.

Presidency priority III. “Climate Action”: Serving Integral Human Development?

A) Climate change and sustainable development

The informal European Council meeting in Sibiu on May 9th highlighted the theme of the **Future of Europe** and set the tone for the discussion on the next EU policies, especially in view of the new upcoming legislative period of the European Parliament and the European Commission.

Effectively addressing climate change, climate justice and sustainable development are key topics for the future shaping of EU policies. In addressing this point, the Sibiu declaration underlines that: *‘Europe will be a responsible global leader. The challenges we face today affect us all. We will continue working with our partners in the world to uphold and develop the rules-based international order, to make the most of new trading opportunities and to jointly tackle global issues such as preserving our environment and fighting climate change.’*

The EU institutions have been active in reacting to new developments related to climate change in the previous term. In November 2018, the European Commission has presented its proposal for an EU long-term strategy which includes two pathways to achieve European-wide net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. However, **the position of EU Member states on intensifying EU engagement on climate change is not homogeneous.**

Another important element during the EU Finnish Presidency will also be the **September UN Summit**, which will likely underline the need for an urgent and coordinated global action.

- Climate justice

For Churches climate change is not limited to the issue of politics in a narrow sense and technology. **Climate change has a significant ethical component**, as it was acknowledged at numerous political fora and by a number of world political leaders. The **climate justice** element is **related in particular to the imbalanced impact of climate change and the unjust suffering of those who contributed to climate change the least.** The most significant impact of climate change will have to be handled by **future generations.** Many of the advantages of industrialisation providing Europe and the West with a position of economic power in the world have been achieved by taking an inappropriate share from the global carbon budget. The European Union has the responsibility to act.

- Climate finance

The EU as a global economic power has the shared responsibility to allocate financial means to assist developing countries in addressing climate change in accordance with the promises given to developing countries through the global negotiation process under the UNFCCC. The next EU financial framework has to allocate sufficient funds for effectively addressing climate change and clean energy production within the EU.

- Urgency to act

In recent initiatives across the continent, **young people have expressed their concerns** related to climate change and a sustainable future which are very much **in line with concerns expressed by a number of Churches.** **Climate change is about our future.** Churches in a number of countries have expressed their support to these initiatives. Churches see the need to move from principles to actions with regard to climate change.

Some forces in Europe are not in favour of opening up the 2030 target discussion. Churches see the urgency of the matter. New available information about impacts of climate change call to **stepping up efforts in the mitigation and reduction of GHGs production**, as well as adaptation to climate change.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Facilitate **progress on the EU internal discussion on climate change in efforts to find a shared EU position that is sufficiently bold and ambitious**. We support the **EU ambition to make the Union carbon-neutral by 2050**, as well as the aim to **finalise the negotiations on the EU climate plan for 2050 by the end of this year**.
- Contribute to the ambition expressed in the Sibiu declaration by making the **EU a responsible global leader in addressing climate change**.
- Take the opportunity of the upcoming discussion on the **EU financial framework to support concrete investments for achieving 2030 climate and energy targets**, as well as to make national and regional spending priorities climate-proof.
- Intensify discussions on setting an appropriate price for carbon emissions that would reflect ‘the ecological truth’. Such a discussion needs to envision a **carbon price that** is socially acceptable and which includes all relevant sectors contributing to carbon emissions (electricity and heat production, transport etc.).

B) Partnerships for Sustainable and Integral Human Development

In recent years, the **EU’s strategic approach to development** seems to be shifting from a donor-recipient dynamic towards **more reciprocal forms of cooperation**. With initiatives, such as the [European External Investment Plan](#) and the [Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investments and Decent Jobs](#), the EU is **opening up a fresh chapter** in its relations with other continents in the world.

On the other hand, however, it can also be observed that a certain **migration- and security driven approach to development** cooperation tends to dominate EU’s priorities and shape its policies towards some regions. In this regard, the Finnish EU Presidency is expected to oversee the final stages of negotiations on the [future partnership framework between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific \(ACP\) countries](#). It will also face a challenge to work on a **positive agenda for EU’s relations with Africa**, oriented towards sustainable human development on both continents.

Churches share a **people-centred and integral** understanding of “*sustainable development*”, as not being merely limited to **economic growth** but also entailing a [social, environmental and governance dimension](#). We encourage efforts towards **fair, mutually beneficial and responsible partnerships** between the EU and other regions, as long as their final objective is to **serve people**. The **dignity of the human person** and the orientation towards the **common good** require that **trade and investment** schemes give a **sustainable perspective to young persons and families** and allow them to fully realise their aspirations and talents in their **local communities**. In this regard, a transition from predatory practices towards **inclusive and virtuous economic processes** dedicated to production and allowing a **fair distribution** of resources and profits should be encouraged.

In view of **inclusive participation** to schemes, such as the [European External Investment Plan](#), it should be ensured that all stakeholders, even the most vulnerable ones, in many cases young persons or women, have **effective access** to economic processes and employment opportunities. This is closely linked with the importance of **strengthening local capacities** through adequate education, formation and training. In order to promote a **peaceful and just environment, effective taxation** policies, efforts on the **rule of law and good governance**, as well as **fighting against illicit financial**

flows and **corruption** should be promoted. In this respect, the EU could play a more active role in adopting **European and international instruments** that ensure the **accountability of all actors** – public and private – in view of their compliance with legal, social and environmental standards.

In line with [Sustainable Development Goal 17](#), the EU's approach to development cooperation would greatly benefit from a **multi-stakeholder partnership**, effectively involving all the key actors for sustainable development in consultation, decision-making and implementing processes. These comprise not only **public authorities** and the **private sector**, but also the **civil society**, **academia** and **research**, as well as **Churches and religious communities** with their numerous grassroots actions in support of the most needy.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- In the context of the on-going EU-ACP negotiations, promote a **fair, mutually beneficial and responsible partnership for people-centred development**, effectively addressing **local needs** and supporting **socio-economic and political empowerment** of young persons, families and local communities. In this sense, **promote a forward-looking agenda for EU's relations with Africa**, going beyond a mere migration- and security-driven preventative approach.
- Ensure that initiatives, such as the [European External Investment Plan](#) and the [Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investments and Decent Jobs](#), allow **effective access** to all stakeholders, even the most vulnerable ones, in many cases young persons or women. Support the **strengthening of local capacities** through adequate education, formation and training measures.
- Adopt **binding and effective human rights due diligence legislation**, including a specific **EU Action Plan on Business and Human Rights**, based on the principles of **corporate social responsibility**. It should also foresee **accountability** mechanisms for transnational companies domiciled or effectively owned in the European Union to ensure compliance of their actions throughout the entire supply chain with **legal, social and environmental** standards; and play a **constructive role** in the on-going negotiations on an **international legally binding instrument at the United Nations** to regulate the activities of multinational companies and other business enterprises with respect to human rights.
- In line with the [European Parliament Resolution addressing shrinking civil society space in developing countries](#) and with [Sustainable Development Goal 17](#), promote the elaboration of **Guidelines for partnerships with Churches and religious organisations in cooperation for development**, based on the experiences of international organisations and programmes (such as *UNICEF, the World Bank, WHO or the UN Development Programme*).

C) A migration & asylum perspective on sustainability and climate change

Though there is no legal framework for the so-called “**climate refugees**” it is clear that dramatic changes in climate push for the mobility of persons, inside their countries and to third countries, including the EU Member States. In this context, **EU Cooperation Aid could be crucial for mitigating the impact of climate change**, allowing people to remain in their home countries, in dignity and security. Therefore, a holistic approach to migration should also pay attention to the root causes, including climate factors that provoke displacement and migratory influx of persons.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To **coordinate migration and cooperation aid policies** that allow people to have a dignified and secure life in their home countries, avoiding forced migration.
- To include the **climate element as an important pull factor** in the external dimension of EU migratory policies.

Presidency priority IV. Comprehensive Security and Migration

A) Lasting human security & sustainable peace through an integral approach

We are in contact with **violent crisis** in Europe's neighbourhood and with **repeating terror attacks** on European soil, while witnessing a global **erosion of the international legal framework** and a **loss of trust in multilateral mechanisms** and practices. **European citizens' perception** of increased security threats and instability is not only amplified by growing **socio-economic inequalities** and **environmental degradation**, but also by a lack of visibility of control on **expanding digital technologies**, including *artificial intelligence*, affecting all spheres of human life. Moreover, an uncontrolled spread of digitalisation is opening up **new conflict environments** and being used as a tool for **hybrid warfare**. **Attacks on critical infrastructures** in the telecommunications, transport or energy domains, often perpetrated by **criminal individuals** or **terrorist groups** are not only posing a significant **threat to the security of citizens** but also to the **democratic order**.

In fostering its "*strategic autonomy*" the European Union has [put in place a number of initiatives](#) to **strengthen the defence cooperation** between Member States through [developing joint defence capabilities](#) and [enhancing their operational readiness in military](#) as well as [civilian areas](#). Hosting the [European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats](#), Finland is in a good position to steer the decisions of further implementation of security and defence measures at EU level in **dialogue with other partners**, notably UN, NATO and OSCE.

We believe security **protects human life and dignity** and that true security can only exist through **sustainable peace**. If not focusing on the **lasting security of persons, families and communities**, merely technical security measures may allow or even lead to a new conflict. In this regard, it should be ensured that **responses to terrorist threats and cyberattacks** go hand in hand with **full respect for fundamental human rights and the rule of law**.

We also believe that an **integral approach** to security and defence should be implemented, **effectively articulating military actors and means** with [civilian peace-building initiatives](#), **diplomacy** and the promotion of **human, socio-economic and ecological justice**.

Churches and religious communities with their worldwide network, their academic and practical experience, as well as their specific grassroots reality are in many ways contributing to promoting stability and peace. An **authentic European Peace policy** could thus greatly benefit from **better integrating the efforts of Churches and religious organisations** in areas such as early warning, conflict prevention, peace-building as well as post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Launch **cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder dialogue processes** involving different types of actors (including state/non-state actors, civil/military actors, economic actors, representatives of civil society, academia, Churches, etc.) in order to specify the [EU level of strategic ambition in the area of security and defence](#) through a **harmonisation of different threat perceptions and strategic cultures** across the European Union in view of promoting lasting human security and sustainable peace.
- Primarily focus initiatives, such as the [Permanent Structured Cooperation](#) and the [European Defence Fund](#), on the **strategic goal of promoting lasting human security and sustainable peace**, and articulate them effectively with **civilian external and internal policy instruments**, including in areas of diplomacy, humanitarian relief, development, trade, economic, social, energy and climate policies.

- Ensure that projects supported under the **European Defence Fund** fully comply with **international legal obligations of the EU and its Member States**, and that they are **effectively screened and assessed by independent experts with different backgrounds** with regard to their **compliance with ethical principles**. In this regard, a clear **anthropological and ethical reference framework** should be elaborated to provide a basis for this assessment, following a broad and inclusive consultation process.
- Promote **international efforts** towards a **global Digital Convention** providing a **comprehensive legal framework** for **addressing** cyber-attacks, ensuring **accountability**, while reinforcing the link to **international human rights standards**.
- Foster **partnerships with Churches and religious organisations** by better integrating their **academic expertise and grassroots actions** within respective **EU peace policy initiatives** in areas, such as early warning, conflict prevention, peace-building as well as post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation.

B) Security in the future EU Multiannual Financial Framework

Finland's Presidency will oversee the negotiations of the next **EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027**. The Finnish Presidency should use its authority to seek unity among the Member States and promote a **comprehensive understanding of peace and security**. Finland has a wealth of experience in mediation and peace processes, which can support its role in addressing the challenges Europe faces and in building cooperation across the Union. Budgeting approaches on security must not be determined by the arms industry, or by false perceptions of internal insecurity and military cooperation with third countries, but rather be based on a responsible peace and development policy. In practice this means:

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Support **bridge-building strategies** of 'soft' power to **combat divisions and addressing hate speech and discrimination**.
- Ensure that the 10% of the **Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument dedicated to migration-related spending does address root causes of migration and forced displacement** in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Prevent subverting the objectives of the EU external action and development budget** by re-orientating them to internal priorities, such as border management and migration control.
- **Ensure future trade agreements and development assistance are not conditional on partner countries curbing migration into Europe.**

C) Migration & Asylum: a «Freedom, Security and Justice» approach

In 1999 the European Council, under the impulse of the then EU Finnish Presidency, determined to work towards a Union of freedom, security and justice. Twenty years later we endorse the **Tampere Milestones**, in particular the aim to develop *“an open and secure European Union, fully committed to the obligations of the Geneva Refugee Convention and other relevant human rights instruments, and able to respond to humanitarian needs on the basis of solidarity.”* (point 4). As Finland again assumes the EU Presidency, it is important for it to recall the Tampere Milestones and to reaffirm a commitment to protection and humanitarian concerns as laid down in international and EU legislation.

Migration is an important part of life in Europe today. Apart from the humanitarian aspect, research indicates that it **makes economic sense to work for orderly and regular migration**. Although there are challenges, migrants contribute to Europe's economic wellbeing and enrich its diverse societies. **Integration** is closely linked with migration and is a task for state, society and migrant alike.

Furthermore, in the light of Finland's commitment to ensuring citizens' security, we reiterate our conviction in the **value of all human life**. **Managing migration** must not lead to ongoing deaths in the Mediterranean Sea and at Europe's external borders. We need meaningful safe and legal passages (e.g. **resettlement and humanitarian visa**) and effective search-and-rescue measures, including disembarkation arrangements, so as to ensure less loss of life of those seeking safety in Europe. Thousands of persons have died when trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea, in a dangerous journey, a situation that should be stopped with all means at disposal.

EU policies should be centred in the **protection of dignity and fundamental rights of human beings and the promotion of the common good**. **Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers** (and in particular, those who are more vulnerable, such as minors, pregnant women, elderly, handicapped persons and victims of human trafficking) deserve, **in any stage of their way and independently of their legal status, full respect for their fundamental rights in accordance to International and EU standards**.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Advance a **protection-oriented reform of the Common European Asylum System**, with responsibility sharing and refugee reception as key principles, providing protection to genuine asylum seekers. A **reform of the Dublin Regulation needs to be replaced with a binding solidarity mechanism**. Proposals for **managing the return of third-country nationals** should be both rational and proportional.
- **Patrolling the Mediterranean Sea** to fight smugglers and traffickers and to rescue persons in distress at sea.
- Creating the conditions to **make the right of refugees and migrants in the EU to voluntary return** to their home countries **effective**, enhancing cooperation with third countries to **return irregular migrants in a humane way and in compliance with human rights international standards**.
- Implementing the recently created **European Border and Coast Guard** that should aim to share the responsibility of jointly guarding the EU external borders and not to unduly reduce the number of persons seeking international protection.
- Implementing a **border management policy sensitive to the needs of people**, in particular those who are more vulnerable, while **respecting the family unity**.
- Promote opportunity in migration as a way to respond to **aging populations and gaps in the labour market**. Take the initiative in **coordinating and supporting integration and equality measures**. Policies should address the specific needs of new arrivals in Europe and encourage their potential to contribute, while at the same time honouring the traditions and needs of EU citizens. Social inclusion and a robust anti-discriminatory policy are integral to building a cohesive society and enhancing safety for all.
- Creating **international mechanisms**, in cooperation with IOM, UNHCR and transit countries, **to avoid migrants and refugees getting stuck in certain transit countries** where serious and systematic violations of fundamental rights take place.

Brussels, 8 July 2019

CONTACTS

COMECE | Commission of the Episcopates of the EU

19, Square de Meeûs | B-1050 Brussels | Belgium

Phone | +32 2 235 05 10

Email | comece@comece.eu

Website | www.comece.eu



[@ComeceEu](#)

CEC | Conference of European Churches

Rue Joseph II, 174 | B-1000 Brussels | Belgium

Phone | +32 2 230 17 32

Email | cec@cec-kek.be

Website | www.ceceurope.org



[@ceceurope](#)