
A united, green, solidarity-based Europe. Christian Churches support the German Presidency

The Churches welcome the programme of the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union - presented by Chancellor Angela Merkel to the European Parliament on 8 July – which they regard to be “ambitious and forward-looking” as it envisages the development of a strong, innovative, just, and sustainable European Union, “based on and acting in line with its common values and principles”, thereby “promoting the common good.” This recognition is found in a Contribution jointly drawn up by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC), with a view to “sharing in a Christian ecumenical spirit, some thematic reflections and proposals” that address the priorities that Germany set out in its programme. **“Need for human relations.”** The COMECE-CEC document, presented to H.E. Michale Klauss, Ambassador at the Permanent Representation of Germany to the EU on July 7, is to constitute the cornerstone of a meeting to be held in Berlin on 27 October between Church dignitaries and the Federal Minister for European Affairs, Michael Roth. “The unsettling experience of the Coronavirus pandemic has shown to us Europeans that we are not isolated individuals, but persons that need both human relations and to live together with the awareness of interconnectedness.” In order to envisage a future for Europe it is necessary “to revitalize our sense of solidarity”, a key word that recurs 17 times in the text, with respect to all issues addressed therein. **Europe’s answer to the pandemic.** As regards the number one priority of the Presidency, Europe’s Answer to the COVID-19 Pandemic, for the Churches, over and above economic issues, it is necessary to avoid “capitulating to fear, extreme nationalism and shortsighted populist interests.” *COMECE and CEC affirm that the proposed recovery “sets out a clear perspective for a Europe with the aim to grow united, on the basis of solidarity.”* With a recommendation “to give specific attention to protecting the most vulnerable in our European societies.” Policy recommendations in this respect include a focus on “developing European research and innovation activities relating to health. **Digital transformation, pros and cons.** With regard to the second Priority of the German Presidency, To make Europe Stronger and More Innovative”, the Churches call for a digital transformation “that is both forward-looking and based on common values”, notably as regards the development of AI “rooted in strong ethical principles”, noting that “the ever-increasing digitalisation of all areas of life also poses great challenges” also in terms of freedom, human dignity and social justice.

“Algorithms are not impartial”,

the Churches write, highlighting the need for comprehensive dialogue, including between civil society and the same Churches, especially when fundamental anthropological issues are at stake. Policy recommendations further include “preventing fragmentations of the development of AI in the EU Member States”, “addressing the concerns, anxiety and discomfort of a growing part of the population that fear being excluded from the ever-faster digital changes in the future.” **Promoting social cohesion.** As for the third Presidency Priority, titled “A fair Europe”, the Churches welcome the proposal to promote “solidarity, sustainability and social cohesion.” “Social justice, ecological justice and contributive justice” are viewed as “key” for the implementation of this instrument. For the Churches this requires an overall budget “that is aligned to the political priorities and values of the EU.” The Conference on the Future of Europe is thus “an important democratic tool” which the Churches look forward “to actively and constructively contributing to and participating in.” *The Churches invite the German Presidency, with respect to policy recommendations, “to explicitly integrate Churches as specific and distinct stakeholders.”* A further request is “to translate the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights into concrete policy initiatives, focusing in particular

on child and in-work poverty by means of common European approaches.” **A “green” and sustainable Europe.** As for the fourth Presidency Priority, A Sustainable Europe, the Churches welcome the Green Deal, and sustainability understood as critical to recovery, “convinced that efforts to overcome impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic must not be shaped along the guidelines aiming to return to previous environment damaging production habits and overconsumption levels.” We must seize this opportunity, write the Christian Churches, “for correcting mistakes of the past as much as possible.” Policy recommendations thus equally invite to take stock of the “lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemics” regarding dramatically reduced carbon emissions from transport as a consequence of reduced travelling and new ways of remote working and on-line meetings. **Security, common values.** The Churches dedicate utmost consideration to the Fifth Presidency Priority regarding “A Europe of Security and Common Values”, commending the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy and the European Commission’s first annual report on the rule of law in each Member State, along with the principle of linking EU budget funds to compliance with the rule of law in Member States.

The joint Contribution of COMECE and CEC delves into challenges such as combating disinformation, along with “all forms of discrimination and racism”, and the challenge of migration.

The Churches express their “great hope” in the definition of shared policies with regard to asylum and migration. The Christian Churches “hope that many of those 30.000 which should have been resettled to the EU in 2020 (pledge made at the Global Refugee Forum December 2019) will still arrive in EU member states in the second half of 2020.” **Partnership with Africa.** With regard to the last Presidency Priority titled “An effective European Union for a rules-based international order anchored in partnership”, COMECE and CEC especially support “deepening the cooperation with Africa by adopting a people-centred European-African agenda.” They sound the alarm for persecuted religious communities around the world: freedom of religion or belief in the world “is not only a human right, but also as a strategic dimension for democratic freedom and fostering social peace, justice and reconciliation.” Moreover, they call for the introduction of “a mechanism to reinforce it outside EU. Policy recommendations include “efforts for a binding due diligence legislation” for businesses; effective measures against illicit trade in small arms and light weapons; the establishment of a Human Security Index to monitor progress in building sustainable peace.

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