

Which Europe at the beginning of the Millennium?

Declarations of grass roots Catholic movements about the future of Europe on the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome

In our continent, the collaboration of the countries that gave life to the European Union has been a very positive project in the history of the last decades. Now, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, Europe faces new challenges. These are the current opening to Eastern Europe and, following them, to Turkey, Europe's role in the world, the high rate of immigration from third countries, the correct operation of her institutions and the objectives to be pursued to ensure her own internal cohesion, social equity and sustainable growth of the economy.

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, the European countries want to outline values and strategies to overcome the difficulties that are presented. Additionally, the RC bishops of Europe are preparing documents and initiatives but with hardly any involvement of God's people. We, as Christians who live our faith in the Catholic Church at grass roots level, also want to contribute our reflections about Europe with respect to some basic questions:

- 1) The role of Europe in the world must be at the centre of our thoughts. It is not sufficient to propose a common policy basis, it is necessary to explain the policies. We think that Europe can and must:
 - adopt a different role to the past in her community policies with the major international institutions (United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization) with respect to the relationships between the North and South of the world with the object of combatting the negative effects of free market globalisation, by promoting a sustainable development and combatting poverty;
 - signal a marked end to the past in the international scene by confirming her independence from the USA, the only global power, and to become a reference point for a policy of mediation and peace in the conflict areas (especially in the Middle East and Africa) where it is very much required;
 - activate the means to achieve a policy of separation from the military structures of the USA, start reducing military expenditure, interrupt all exports of arms and develop her own initiatives or promote and support the member countries or civilian organizations involved in non-violent actions for the prevention, mediation and control of conflicts.
- 2) The rights of the citizens and workers are confirmed in certain documents of the European Union but their application must be pursued with greater determination. Specifically, basic social rights are still insufficiently guaranteed because the ideology of the free market system takes precedence. The problems relating to the defence of the social system must be prudently confronted in an equitable manner to avoid the formation of new large manifestations of poverty amongst the under privileged (pensioners, unemployed, youth, large families...). The question of gender equality is not sufficiently legislated and underwritten;
- 3) In our continent, the marginalised of the Gospel are the workers and their families who come from countries outside the Community. The policies of the EU and the member countries are insufficient with respect to their legitimate requirements both for those immigrants already in the Union or those who want to enter; and are singularly unappreciative of the contribution of this new energy to European society.
- 4) Criminal organizations of all kinds are on the increase, thanks to the globalization of the economy and communications and they are expanding in Europe whilst the institutions ignore the gravity of the situation and do not promote the necessary radical, continuous and varied interventions.

Whilst we make these proposals for a new Europe with our hearts and minds attuned to the Gospels, we cannot understand and do not support the continuous pronouncements and the activities of the Catholic bishops to obtain in the constitutional texts of the EU and in the announced "Declaration of Berlin" references to the "Christian roots" of Europe and the reference to "God". We are convinced that the important cultures in the history of Europe are manifestly more than one, that the strong marks left by Christianity are full of so many shadows and that the clear separation of the religious sphere from the civil one, is of major importance both for Humanity and Christianity. There also exists the risk that due to this claim by the bishops, other claims to their own "identity" can arise thus causing misunderstandings and

useless antihistorical divisions. The Word of God to be heard does not require to be recognised or legislated for by the civil authorities and should be proposed by a poor Church and a ministry of service without charge. We feel that there is sufficient protection for religious liberty, equally as a private person and collectively, as provided in Article 10 of the Charter of fundamental rights (see the Treaty of Nice) and we do not consider necessary the institutionalised presence of the churches in the governance of the EU (Article 52 paragraph 3 of the project for a European Constitution). We consider it is sufficient for the churches and their organizations to make their voices heard by means of the ordinary methods provided in Article 47 in accordance with the corresponding rules of participative democracy.

We also propose that the Catholics of the European countries begin to discuss in depth and with liberty the existing situations of the relationships between the State and the Churches which vary from country to country, although almost everywhere, they are founded on conditions of privilege for the Catholic Church. We hope to see the reflection being inspired by the *Gaudium et Spes* constitution of Vatican II, which, in chapter 76, indicates that the Church "does not place her hopes in privileges offered by the civil authorities but, on the contrary, renounces certain rights legitimately acquired, where it could be considered that their use could place in doubt the sincerity of her testimony". In consequence, we should accept that by discussing these relationships we are thinking more of a Church in line with God's people and less of a mere hierarchical structure. And that was what was proposed at the start of the 2nd Ecumenical Vatican Council.

Whilst we reflect on the future of Europe at the start of the millennium in a critical moment of the history of humanity we must be also act in consequence to establish the nature and extent of our direct responsibilities in the ecumenical path of the Christian churches whose hierarchies proceed too slowly whilst the Christian people are more advanced than those who guide them. Likewise, we must also bear the responsibility for dialoguing with other religions, especially with Islam. The convergence of religions and their major objective for a common social ethics for all people to live in harmony would be an extraordinary contribution for our continent and its institutions. We must follow the words of the Gospels in the hope that a new Europe can contribute to make another possible world.

European Network Church on the Move
Fédération des Réseaux de Parvis (47 associations)
Redes Cristianas (80 associations)

Catholics for Free Choice (CFFC)
Pavés
Wir sind Kirche, Germany
Iniziativa Christenrechte in den Kirke
Iglesia de Base de Madrid
Dones creientes, Valencia
Catòlics por el derecho a decidir
Somos Iglesia
David et Jonathan
Observatoire chrétien de la laïcité
Nous sommes aussi l'Eglise
Partenia 2000
Demain l'Eglise
Femme et hommes en Eglise
Esperance 54, Nancy
Chrétiens pour une Eglise dégagée de l'Ecole
confessionnelle
Fraternité Agapé

Amis du 68 rue de Babylone, Paris
SEL 85
Droits et libertés dans les Eglises
Humanistes et Croyants 35
Chrétiens sans frontières, Gironde
Recherche et Partage, Valence
Equipe National et d'Animation des
Communautés de Base
Jonas-Vosges
Nos Somos Igreja
We Are Church, Finland
Initiativgruppe "Für eine lebendigere kirche"
Comunità cristiane di base italiane
Noi Siamo Chiesa

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