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Rev. Rüdiger NOLL
Director
Church & Society Commission

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Dear Mr Noll,

Thank you for your letter and your views on the current crisis and the Lisbon Strategy.

The employment and social impact of the economic crisis, which may bring higher long-term unemployment and greater social inequality, is of great concern to the European Union and to the Commission. Social recovery measures that build on and supplement the European Economic Recovery Plan are therefore needed. Most measures that can mitigate the negative effects of the crisis on labour markets are in the hands of the Member States, the social partners and other players, including local authorities and civil society. Nonetheless, it is vital to work for the convergence of national policies at EU level, avoid negative spill-over effects, step up coordination, exchange best practice, and mobilise and modernise the existing EU Funds. A coordinated EU response is therefore needed.

The Communication 'A shared Commitment for Employment' (COM(2009) 257), adopted on 3 June, draws on the Employment Summit, the workshops that preceded it and debate in the European Parliament, and was the basis for discussions at the European Council on 18 and 19 June. While it also paves the way for recovery, the EU's Shared Commitment for Employment puts forward key priorities and actions to preserve jobs and help those in difficulty in the priority areas of maintaining employment, creating jobs and promoting mobility, upgrading skills and matching labour-market needs, and increasing access to employment.

The objective is for all players - including civil society, trade unions and employers' organisations, as well as the Member States and the EU - to work together to deliver on the Shared Commitment by implementing concrete measures. The EU will make EU funding available through the European Social Fund to support people affected by the crisis in 2009 and 2010. We are examining the possibilities of setting up a new EU loans facility, in conjunction with the European Investment Bank Group, to provide micro-credits for some of Europe's most disadvantaged groups.

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Our responses to the crisis should, however, go hand and hand with pursuing the structural reforms as set out in the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs. A strong, coordinated response is needed to meet the challenges of globalisation, ageing, technological development and climate change. The Commission will launch a public consultation in this autumn on Europe's future growth and jobs strategy. This should consider those challenges and any persisting structural challenges that the current crisis may bring. It will also need to reflect on the governance of the strategy by involving key stakeholders to a greater extent, in order to ensure the measures needed are implemented effectively. We invite you to actively contribute to this consultation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Henning Klaus', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Henning KLAUS