

**Conference of European Churches  
Church and Society Commission**

**Working group on European Integration Process**

**Churches in the Process of European Integration**



## Foreword

The Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) has a major task in following the activities of European institutions and helping CEC's 127 Member Churches to engage with and comment on the issues raised by and in the institutions. Its Working Group on the European Integration Process set itself the goal of discussing what it meant by European integration. It also wanted to ask what the churches could contribute to the process. This document is the first result. It is destined to help the churches discuss the issue among themselves and with people from the institutions.

For the first time a group of people from churches in all parts of Europe have reflected together on this question. Earlier documents, such as that published in 1997 by the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society<sup>1</sup>, were largely based on Western European experiences and ideas. This document needs to be read as a contribution from the whole of Europe. This is the cause of some of its differences from earlier texts and this gives it a special value. Indeed, I wonder whether the European Union does not need to carry out a similar exercise with the states of Central and Eastern Europe.

The document draws on discussions in the Working Group and also on discussions with people from the European Union institutions which have taken place both in the regular dialogue meetings which the Church and Society Commission organises with COMECE and the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission and in less formal contacts with Parliamentarians and

civil servants. It also draws on the discussion during a study day at the meeting of CEC's Central Committee in October 2000.<sup>2</sup>

One aspect of the discussion on this text has related to the use of the words "integration" and "unification". In particular this affected the choice of title for the document. Some argued that "integration" had a wider and looser meaning which was open to debate whereas "unification" implied some specific and concrete goal. "Integration" was seen as having a more open meaning than "unification". In the end, the Executive Committee of the Commission preferred "integration".

The document is not a final word on the subject. It is offered as a tool to help Member Churches of CEC and others reflect on the purpose and goal of European integration. This is particularly important in view of the debate launched by the European Council in Nice in December 2000 on the future development of the European Union. This requires reflection and the whole of civil society is invited to contribute to that. There is clearly a role for the churches and I hope that CEC's Member Churches will find this text and the report of the Central Committee study day useful in enabling participation in the debate. The Church and Society Commission will look for effective ways of channeling the result into the wider debate, for example, in future dialogue meetings with the European Commission.

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<sup>1</sup> *Towards a Continent Reconciled with Itself: The Contribution of an Enlarged European Union*, EECCS, 1997

<sup>2</sup> *The role of the churches in the process of European integration – a search for common European values*, CEC, October 2000

The public debate is expected to go on until the next European Union Intergovernmental Conference expected in 2004. There is time for the churches to engage in the discussion. Nevertheless, the debate will become more and more focused as time goes on. Contributions about the aims and goals of European integration - the vision and soul questions - will be more effective the sooner they are made.

The particular questions which might be asked in the Member Churches and associated organisations of CEC might be these:

- What hopes and fears do people in your church or organisation have about the future of the European Union? and your country's membership of it?
- What opportunities or problems will the European Union present to your country in the future?
- What difference do you think that the European Union with more Member States will make to your country (whether or not it is or will be a member)?
- How does your church or organisation evaluate these hopes and fears, opportunities and problems?

I would invite Member Churches of CEC and other readers of this text to let the Church and Society Commission have their comments as soon as possible. The Working Group will next meet in the Autumn of 2001. Initial comments by the end of October 2001 would, therefore, be very helpful.

Keith Jenkins,  
Associate General Secretary and  
Director of the Church and Society Commission  
May 2001

## 1. Introduction

Today the European integration process enjoys a high priority in European political life. The political and social changes in Europe which have taken place since the beginning of the 90ies set in motion a major debate about Europe in general and the European Union in particular. This concerns not only the driving forces and values, its cohesion and its ability to build a true European community, but also the common role and responsibility of the continent on the global scene. More recent years have brought a new dynamic into the process. The new European Commission, which started its work in the summer of 1999, declared the integration process in Europe and the enlargement of the European Union major priorities. Acceleration of the negotiation process resulted in a wide spread expectation that the first accession of candidate countries to the EU will become reality in a very short time. The strategic objectives of the Commission for the period 2000-2005, as published just after the Commission entered office stated that the European Union should be ready to accept new members by the end of 2002.

In November 2000, the European Commission announced, in the line with the acceleration of the accession process, a new strategy for the process linked with an evaluation of the situation of each candidate country.<sup>3</sup> This was much more precise any previous texts related to the enlargement and the strategy for the next phase of the negotiations is set out in the document.<sup>4</sup> The Nice Summit of December 2000 brought important elements into the debate about the future of the EU. The summit adopted the new treaty of the European Union, which codified necessary changes in the internal and institutional structures of the EU in order that process of accession of

new members could continue.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, the Summit did appropriate work in the right direction. It is not yet clear, however, whether this will be sufficient for the successful completion of the accession process. For the first time, the highest political decision-makers of the EU indicated a more specific date for the first accessions at Nice.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the summit approved a declaration on “the Future of the Union”. Having argued that the Treaty in Nice opens a way for the accession of new Member states, the declaration calls for a deeper and wider debate about the future development of the Union.

European integration is a complex process which has to confront problems and difficulties. In addition to administrative and technical problems related to the functioning of the relevant institutions and the sharing of power and decision making between them, there are also problems focused more on the substance of the Union’s existence itself. It has been recognised at various points that a common Europe means more than just a common market. It has been noted that, if the European integration process is to be fully successful, the European Union needs to find an

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<sup>3</sup> *Enlargement Strategy Paper 2000*, Report on Progress Towards Accession by each of the Candidate Countries

<sup>4</sup> There is developed a concept of the ‘road maps’ which will serve as indicators of ‘what needs to be done’ in the coming period of time for the individual candidate countries in order successfully fulfil all required conditions but which will serve also as points of reference, which will mark achieved progress on the way.

<sup>5</sup> This is discussed in more detail in *The Nice Treaty – Description and Evaluation*, Church and Society Commission of CEC, January 2001.

<sup>6</sup> ‘as from the end of 2002, in the hope that (those countries) will be able to take part in the next European Parliament elections’ (in 2004)

appropriate place for the spiritual and ethical aspects of European construction.<sup>7</sup> Equally, it has been recognised that the European Union, both on its own and also with other European states, needs a common strategy for the future and a clear goal. Such a goal should be an expression of hope for all European citizens and one in which the various cultural, ethical and religious traditions of the continent would find their place.

The new situation of the European integration process, both the opportunities and also the apparent difficulties, has also to be taken into consideration by the churches. The European integration process is an important focus of attention for the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches. The Commission has established a working group on European Integration Process the role of which is to monitor the process and help to clarify the role of the churches in it. In presenting this paper, the Working Group wants to continue work already done in following the European integration process from the side of Christian churches.<sup>8</sup> While respecting ecclesial variety in Europe and a variety of opinions among churches on some particular aspects of the process, we want the Christian churches to express a positive attitude regarding European integration process. At the same time, however, we want to pay attention also to some of the problems, which have recently become apparent. We want this to be a positive contribution to overcoming the problems and to the search for a common European identity and common values in the continent.

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<sup>7</sup> Starting moment for this line of thinking was an initiative of the former president of the European Commission Jacques Delors.

<sup>8</sup> Following this task, the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS), which was a predecessor of the Church and Society Commission of the CEC, issued in 1997 the report: *Towards a continent reconciled with itself – The Contribution of and Enlarged European Union*. In 1997 the EECCS adopted also a declaration reaffirming its commitment to the process of enlargement of the European Union.

## **2. Challenges of European unification process**

### **2.1. Decreasing of popular support for EU enlargement**

The initiation of an unprecedented enlargement involving 13 candidate countries opened a new ambition for the EU. This process cannot be compared in its scope and ambition with any previous enlargement of the EU. Through this project, the EU expects in a few years a substantial increase of its area, almost doubling the number of its member countries, and increasing the number of its citizens by a third. This ambitious project has, however, disclosed a lot about the true substance of the Union. The present enlargement process is accompanied by an urgent need to resolve fundamental questions about the nature of the Union itself and by challenges to define what the Union is about and what is its final goal. Developments in the last ten years show that Europe is on the move to the certain sort of unity. The process of enlargement is just a part of the broader move. Since neither the goals nor substantial elements of the form of this process have been clearly formulated, a number of side effects are appearing. The difficulty of the process has been revealed recently clearly by referendum in Denmark. The question raised in this public vote was about accepting the common European currency. The substance of it went however far beyond it. The negative vote in the referendum is not to be interpreted simply as a disagreement of the majority of the population in Denmark with the common European currency or with the idea of European integration. The result can be interpreted as a disagreement on the part of a major part of the Danish people with the specific kind of integration which has been pursued up until now.

A similar sign is shown in the repeated opinion polls, regularly carried out in all member countries of the EU, which include questions related to the coming enlargement of the Union. On the basis of the latest results only 38% of the citizens in the current member states support acceptance of new countries into the Union. It is obvious that there is a regional unbalance which needs to be taken into consideration in these results.<sup>9</sup> However, far more alarming than the figure of this poll is the trend which it reveals of decreasing public support for EU enlargement. One year earlier 43 per cent of respondents replied positively to the same question.<sup>10</sup>

On several occasions, it has been shown that the current situation in the European integration process reveals a widening gap between intensifying expectations of tangible results and loss of patience resulting from dissatisfaction with the style of current enlargement process. As a consequence of a confused picture about EU, its character and motivations, which prevails especially among the population in the candidate countries, a wide spread image has been developed in which the EU is conceived mostly in terms of prosperous materialism. Increasing disillusion is then a cause not only for a decreasing public support of the EU enlargement, but also a cause for the increase of radicalism in society.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The lowest popular support of the enlargement of the EU seems to be in Austria and France

<sup>10</sup> Eurobarometer 53, October 2000

<sup>11</sup> Recent results of election in some European countries and strong popular support for extremist politicians point out this tendency.

## **2.2. Scope and character of the integration process**

A broad discussion about the final aim of the enlargement process, the values undergirding it and the various options for its development is now recognised both on the public and expert levels as a necessary condition for further steps in the European integration process. This discussion should however reach out wider than to EU member and candidate countries. It is very clear that enlargement of the EU will have its effects throughout the continent, not exclusively in those directly affected. Enlargement of the EU will have its impact on the whole European continent. Taking into account the human and ethical dimensions as well as the evident economic and political dimensions it is perhaps more appropriate to speak about the process of unification in Europe.<sup>12</sup> At the same time attention must be paid to the fact that European integration process does not take place in isolation from the rest of the world. The role of Europe as a global player taking part in the globalisation process needs to be recognised. European integration and the globalisation are themes, which cannot be treated completely separately.

The process of European unification is certainly a complex enterprise. At least two basic streams can be recognised in it. On the one hand it is expanding the area of freedom, democracy and prosperity. On the other hand, at least equal attention must be paid to protection of the rich cultural, ethnic and spiritual diversity of the continent. The European Union has to find its way forward in the challenging tension between these two aspects of the integration process. The EU should 'Europeanise' itself. This means that EU should seek to incorporate and include into itself, more deliberately than it has up to now, those elements which are genuinely 'European' and not characteristic only of a certain part of the continent. Otherwise in the future, there will be

less and less reason to call it 'European'. This however must not be done on the expense of diversity. Thus, the EU needs to find a value-based concept which will provide a foundation for creating a genuine European community. The tension between the common, comprehensive and general on the one hand, and the particular, regional or national on the other, does not need to be counterproductive.

Churches welcome the effort outlined in the Strategic Objectives of the Commission under the well-chosen title "Shaping a new Europe". They affirm its basic statements that it is necessary to have greater involvement of citizens in the mutual dialogue and to engage in much more value-based discussion about various facets of the European integration process. The initiative of the European Commission to prepare the new white paper on European governance and to use it to encourage a discussion among citizens about European values, issues and decision-making is in line with this effort and needs to be also welcomed. The intention of the Belgian Presidency of the EU (July-December 2001) to pursue with focusing effort a debate on finality and aims of the Union deserves similar support. This discussion, however, needs to be open, sincere and as broad as possible. It needs also to involve all parts of society. It needs also to be spread into the various parts of the continent. Only on the basis of such a debate can the project of European unification be successful.

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<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Theo Junker, Director of the office of the European Parliament in: *'The role of the churches in the process of European integration – a search for common European values,'* Conference of European Churches, October 2000



## **2.3. Challenges of the European policies**

### **2.3.1. Lack of transparency in the negotiating process.**

Several recent signs confirmed a known fact that European society suffers from the lack of public debate and appropriate information about enlargement process, about its source and inspiration and also about its final goals and consequences. This was felt both in EU member states as well as in candidate countries. For a long time, enlargement and the European integration process have been reserved for politicians, experts and some involved activists. The 'democratic deficit', which has been recognised as a negative characteristic of the European institutions as a whole, is also present as a feature in the accession process. The European Commission has to fulfil the additional task: to find a way how to explain the complicated facts and issues explain to the general public and to 'involve' them. The European Commission is faced with the task of how to pursue an "open door" policy. In the recent months the Enlargement Directorate General of the European Commission issued a new Communication strategy related to the process of EU enlargement. This initiative has recognised that there is a serious deficit in public information about the process, its character, progress and goals. The last European Commission Progress report stated:

'Enlargement can only succeed if it is a social project involving all citizens and not just an elite. Only genuine participation can achieve this. Information is not enough. We have to set in motion a wide-ranging dialogue in our societies to make the risks and benefits clear to people and let them know that their concerns are being taken seriously.'<sup>13</sup>

This is appreciated. European integration needs to be a matter of the all people in Europe not just matter of 'negotiators,' involved journalists and a few interested individuals. In spite of the fact

the fulfilling of the accession criteria is highly technical operation and it is neither possible nor desirable that all technicalities would be available for public, it is necessary to find a way how to involve public more into it.

### **2.3.2. Free movement of persons, migration**

Free movement of persons, with the free movement of goods, services and capital, is one of basic attributes on which the EU structure is developed. Free movement is guaranteed for all citizens of the EU. Enlargement of the EU and accession of the new countries especially from the Central and Eastern Europe often creates fears. The arrival of a 'cheap labour force', waves of migrants from the East to the West, endangering of the social system of some EU countries are often themes of various statements and debates. These expectations are however not based on realistic assumptions. Several studies confirm it.<sup>14</sup> It also has to be also recognised at the official level that 'after the dramatic period when the borders were first opened, the flow has stabilised and is likely to remain stable... even after accession to full EU membership, the demand for the cheap labour will continue for some time but the 'trader-tourist' from candidate countries will soon become an endangered species and the balance of the costs and benefits of emigration will change in favour of staying home.'<sup>15</sup> Figures of economic growth in those border regions of the

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<sup>13</sup> European Commission Progress report 2000, p.5

<sup>14</sup> as e.g. study of the Institute for space planning in Austria, February 2001

<sup>15</sup> *The Long-Term Implications of EU Enlargement: The Nature of the New Border*, The Final report of the Reflection Group set up by the Forward Studies Unit of the European Commission and the Robert Schuman Centre of the European University Institute in Florence chaired by Giuliano Amato, 1999, p.51

EU which have candidate countries as their neighbours suggest that the effect of open borders may be exactly opposite. The key question is not so much how large these flows will be, but the extent to which restrictive measures on the part of the EU force these flows into illicit channels, with associated high costs in political economic, social and individual human terms.<sup>16</sup> In spite of this evidence, this line of argument has not found significant support among European policy decision-makers. Very often they are playing a political game and speaking about their 'fear from outsiders.' In Western Europe immigration is perceived as a major problem. Sensitivity to the issue in some countries as it is caused by certain politicians and media is however very often far greater than the real size of the migratory movements.

There is though much deeper aspect of the whole theme related to migratory movements than just a fashionable "fear of easterners" in certain political circles. Europe has a long tradition of dealing with various sorts of migrants covering the wide spectrum from asylum seekers to seasonal workers. In spite of that, there has recently been a substantially more negative attitude towards migrants in some European countries. Migration has been often identified as a serious problem especially in relation to future expectations in Europe. Facing these current trends the EU and European countries should recognise not only negative aspects of migration and impact which migration would have on social and financial capacity of their economies, but honour also its positive aspects. 'Being on the move' is part of the natural phenomenon of human life. Migrants and asylum seekers must not be treated as a second class citizens in the future Europe. The present content of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights offers in this respect a substantial material for further improvements.

### **2.3.3. Human and social costs of the integration process**

The European integration process has also some significant side effects besides its undoubtedly positive dimension. It has to be recognised that along with unification process in Europe there is a parallel process of creating of new dividing lines. High expectations are very often confronted with a hard reality. Accession countries have to overcome significant difficulties in order to be able to fulfil some of the required criteria. The new EU strategy for enlargement stated that the most advanced candidate countries already have functioning market economies and they are ready to withstand the pressure of entering the free market in the EU. On the other hand the high human and social costs of that process have to be taken into consideration. Special concern has to be expressed about regional differences in some countries. In some regions the unemployment has been risen up to 40% and among some minority group (e.g. Roma) unemployment can reach 80-90 per cent. Rapid transformation of economies in accession countries has also other negative social consequences such as sharp increases in wealth and income inequality, a severe rise in poverty or a decline in economic security. The other social group in candidate countries which suffers especially from negative consequences of preparing for enlargement are elderly and handicapped people who live exclusively on state support. Considering these facts, a serious question has to be raised: what are the bearable human and social costs of the whole process? This question needs to be addressed not only on the level of national governments but also on the level of appropriate European institutions. Only with such consideration and resulting action is it possible to maintain the credibility of the process which is basic condition for its future success.

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p.52

Transformation of agriculture needs a special concern in the accession process. This is valid both for dealing with the actual problems related to this chapter of the *acquis communautaire* but also for dealing with information about it and its sharing in society. Differing value systems in different parts of Europe are related to agriculture. It must be noted that agriculture is not always exclusively related to effectiveness and productivity and not exclusively conceived as a significant part of the food chain. Agriculture and rural societies prove to be important as an intrinsic value related with a very specific way of life. Difficulties in discussion about the setting of the standards in agricultural policy inside the EU exist and have been underlined by the recent spread of animal diseases in various EU states perhaps closely linked with negative consequences of intensive farming. The problem of standard setting will be even more difficult when it becomes a question of very strict imposition of those standards and policies in regions which are not accustomed to them. In some of accession countries a significant part of society is still engaged in agriculture. The social consequences of the process of change in this particular sector need to be considered with special attention. Transformation of agriculture is a process, which took a considerable amount of time and energy in Western European countries. What had continued for a number of years in Western Europe is required to happen in much quicker process in candidate countries. The results are drastic changes in social structure of rural communities. Those who are losing their place in rural regions are moving to cities where they increase the number of those who have to struggle with poverty and social exclusion.

#### **2.3.4. Future borders of the European Union, relations to the neighbours**

The current process of the enlargement of the EU is not just an episode in the development of the Union. Both, the scope of the enlargement and also its quality – accession of the countries which have been for long period of time behind the Iron Curtain – underline the fact that it is a moment which will substantially influence the future shape and possibilities of the EU. Taking into consideration these facts, it is quite natural to ask questions about the future perspective of the Union. What are its final limits in terms of geography, internal capacity and political will? How will the EU develop after enlargement? The question of the future borders of the EU with its neighbours is of crucial importance. The EU should do its best to avoid the creation of a new, even if 'soft', "Iron Curtain" on its new Eastern border. The negative effects of introducing of visa policy in some border regions of the future EU members states contribute to the worsening of social problems in the respective regions and also contribute to damaging the image of the EU which is identified as a cause of increasing problems. Besides paying appropriate attention to local problems in the border regions, the EU should already now enter into a dialogue with its future neighbours about the common vision of the future Europe that would include not only EU but also other European countries.

### **3. Spiritual and ethical dimensions**

#### **3.1. What unites Europe?**

Development of the European community went through substantial changes in the last 50 years. From the simple framework for economic co-operation in dealing with certain commodities and the basic concept of reconciliation after the war, Europe arrived today at a stage where serious questions about its substance need to be asked and answered with renewed intensity. Bipolar division of the continent disappeared and the EU seeks its new role in the continent which is driven towards intensified co-operation and unification. What does the European Union stand for today? Is it a community of values? Or just an expanding common market? A rich man's club? Is the EU just another episode in the history of European power politics? The next empire? What power will keep citizens of different ethnic, cultural, social and religious background of the enlarged EU together in the future? Enlargement is not only a wish of the candidate countries; it is also seen by the existing member states as a vital interest of member states in the effort to increase the economic market. In the light of this the questions of why the EU needs to be enlarged must be posed. What are the real reasons for that? Answers to these questions are of crucial importance for any further development in the continent. Europe has reached the stage when it is essential to learn from history and face the present reality with the founding principle of reconciliation and with original inspirations on which the Union was built. The ideals and visions of founders of what is now the EU - personalities like Schumann, Monnet and Adenauer - should once more be put alongside the present reality. Europe needs once again a clear explanation what are its roots and goals in its effort to create a community.

Experience on the present situation in Europe proves that those who are in power and who make the principal decisions about the future shape of Europe are not primarily interested in other parts of the continent for certain cultural qualities which might be found there. Their motivation is very pragmatic. The question, which is urgently to be asked, is then: what unites Europe? Is the expanding market the main or even the only driving force? Churches have a strong voice to be heard in this point. Their position can be expressed in words of recently issued Report of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches in which is stated that: 'European unification is not – and not primarily – an economic endeavour; the economy is only one aspect of the project. The development of economic well being is as much as instrument of peace and justice as a result of increasingly closer, peaceful ties among peoples.'<sup>17</sup> Taking this view is the way to convince certain present sceptics on the question of European integration that the aim of the present endeavour is not to build the fortress of Western Europe, but work for the prospect of the whole continent.

#### **3.2. Does Europe need commitment for values?**

The process of European integration is a complex enterprise. Opening of borders between states and enabling of free movement of person will result in intensive contacts between people and groups of different backgrounds, experiences and traditions. The development of a common Europe must not end, however, with the discussion of administrative technicalities. At an earlier

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<sup>17</sup> *The Challenges of Europe for the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches and its Member Churches*, a text published by the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, 2000

stage, the European Commission recognised this. The need to give the developing European Union a sense of direction and purpose as it moved beyond the single market to a political union – what Jacques Delors called “giving a soul to Europe” - has been part of ethos which surrounded European institutions for several years.<sup>18</sup> At the present stage, however, much more needs to be taken into consideration. Churches are aware of it and on various occasions clearly expressed their position in this regard. The most recent document to cite is the statement which came from Rumania, signed by leaders of all Christian churches and of other religions in the country: ‘Process of European integration can be completed only if economic dimension will be accompanied by the spiritual dimension.’<sup>19</sup> Ethical and spiritual dimensions of the future European construction are unavoidable requirements, if process of European integration wants to be successful. It also means that those who bear political responsibility for the future shape of the continent must take properly into account the role of the churches, religious communities and other value based groups and institutions.

If the future European Union has to survive as a cohesive unit, much more attention should be paid to the areas which are now outside practical negotiations in the accession process and the fulfilment of the criteria of accepting the *acquis communautaire*. It was stated in various fora and on several occasions that respect for diversity is a substantive element of European identity. How concretely will the ‘diversity of nations, cultures and values’ be realised and respected in the future Union? From this follows the question which is the bottom line of the debate: is cultural diversity in Europe a threat to its unity or a positive contribution to it? And consequently, how can a common European identity be developed on the base of this diversity? There was a certain

enthusiasm in discussions of this kind at the beginning of 90ies. Now it seems that the momentum of that time has lost its significance. Administrative work, full of vast number of technicalities, necessary for creating functioning institutions of the EU, has veiled the original intention. Accompanied by mistrust and very often by misunderstandings, this has caused an increasing lethargy in the progress of the European project. In such an atmosphere technical discussions on accession of new countries still continue, on some occasions even with remarkable progress, but the spirit of the whole endeavour risks gradually evaporating. Several years ago European Commission initiated not only a discussion but also a project under the name ‘Soul for Europe’. The European Commission in co-operation with Christian churches and other communities of faith and conviction tried to contribute in this project to the search for ‘European soul’ by specific methods and concrete tools. Projects of this kind should play a substantial role in developing a sense of European community.

### **3.3. The final aim of the Union**

The future development of the Union its role and responsibility on the European continent and the relation of the Union to other European countries are themes which are closely related. How does one define a potential candidate for membership of the European Union? Are the criteria solely economic and political, or are they also geographic, societal, and cultural? These questions are not only theoretical ones. They have also consequences, which need to be considered. If the

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<sup>18</sup> Call of the former President of the European Commission Jacques Delors for deepening of European spiritual dimension and necessity of development of ‘European soul’ goes back to 1990

<sup>19</sup> *The Declaration of Religions*, Bucharest, May 2000

main goal of the EU is nothing but creating a common market, it is not necessary to struggle with a complicated process of accession. If however the goal is more complex and more challenging, it needs to be formulated in an understandable way. It has to be recognised that European Union is not identical with Europe. The creation of a common Europe must be based neither on an expansion of a Western lifestyle nor on imposing of Western standards on other parts of the continent. The project of European unification has a chance to succeed only if the mutual dialogue and learning will be the main method in pursuing it.

Having in mind this basic fact, the ultimate goal of the current process of integration, so strongly supported by the European Union institutions, should be clearly formulated.<sup>20</sup> Is the final goal creating of a certain political entity for which the name 'European Union' might be used, or developing a sense of European community? 'Economic and political entity' and 'community' are two different things, which are not necessarily identical. By clarifying of the goal and also the internal ability to reach it, the EU should not only the internal difficulties related to its own *raison d'être*, but also the difficulties which can be expected in terms of the future relations of the EU with its perspective neighbours.

### **3.4. European identity – European community**

Discussion about finality of the European Union is not the only absent dimension of the present phase of the European integration process. Spiritual and ethical aspects are equally missing. One aspect belonging to this area is a debate about a substantial question: What is the role of communal values in Europe? The process of developing of a common Europe is certainly a

process of developing a sense of European community. A major stream of European thinking, with its source in the tradition of the Enlightenment substantially supports the role of the human individual as the basic unit of society. This approach was also taken in the recent drafting of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The true community, though, is not a sum of individuals, and as well the true union is not a sum of nations. In the building of common Europe much more attention should be paid to the question of cohesion of community. Importance of building a community has been taken seriously into consideration earlier stage of the development of the European structure. However, in later days administrative and technical work in building of European institutions and foundations for the proper functioning of European political mechanism prevailed over the original ethos on which the whole construction has been built. The true value of 'community' should be once again given importance in the European context.

A natural feature of the 'community' is life in solidarity. The importance of solidarity will be increased after accession of new members from Central and Eastern Europe. Understanding and solidarity, especially from the point of view of the present Member States of the EU, will be one of keystones of building of a new European construction. One of the dangerous moments for the political potential of developing of a two-speed Europe is the construction of new division lines between 'better' and 'less successful' European countries, a division line between those who are

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<sup>20</sup> Lack of vision for the future Europe at the current stage of development was stated on several occasions. Several contributions by top European politicians tackling this topic have been registered in the recent period of time. One of most important texts in this respect is the '*Vision for Europe*' of the Belgian prime minister Guy Verhoftadt, from September 2000

rich and those whose living standards are not so high. Solidarity in European development needs to be taken as theme of a broader debate about Europe. This would mean a Europe in which would be developed not only European institutions but also a true European community.

Communal life, the relation of the individual to the community and status of both individual and community are very fundamental themes for Europe. The starting point for them should be underlining of the very specific role of the family as a basic unit of society. There are crises for family life in some European countries. They have far-reaching impacts on various elements of societal life, including such divergent aspects as criminality but also a self-understanding society as one cohesive unit. Demographic changes in Europe and the increasing problem of ageing in some European countries are also, at least in part, related to the crises of family and communal life. Even if this is a more general phenomenon, in some parts of Europe, the crises of this sort are progressing faster in some other parts while in others they are not so significant. The EU should make much more effort in support of family life. This should be pursued not only on the level of particular directives, but also in a general supportive attitude at the level of basic texts, such as European treaty or Charter of Fundamental Rights.

### **3.5. Regional and spiritual diversity**

Developing European identity is a main challenge of the continuing process of European unification. This process however must be shaped as a mutual interplay between unity and diversity. The richness of Europe consists in the variety of ethnic, cultural and religious traditions, which needs to be developed in its own way. Developing of the proper concept of

subsidiarity has to be taken as a basic methodology in the process of European unification. It has to be recognised that European identity consists of different orders of values existing together. The biblical notion of multiple identity as it is introduced in Paul's letter to Romans is something that can be further developed especially in the conditions on our continent.

The situation of minorities is an issue in this context, widely recognised as an issue of substantial importance for the future of Europe. Respecting minorities is one of the political criteria for the candidate countries to demonstrate in the accession process. It has to be so, because only in this way can the rich diversity of Europe be saved. Protection of the rights of minorities is intensively followed in the activities of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe. The EU should be more consistent in following the issue and work more closely together with these more pan-European institutions. The basic guideline for dealing with minorities should be drawn from the fact that the same standards should be required from all stakeholders. Attention should be paid not only to ethnic minorities, but also to all other minorities: cultural, linguistic and also religious.

The issue of recognising various traditions and the rights of minorities needs to be taken into serious consideration. Its various aspects need to be brought into a proper balance. One question would be what is the role of local and regional communities in the current European process. How can a proper balance be found between adaptation to the main stream and preserving of indigenous cultures and identities? Is the expansion of positively European values necessary to be done at the expense of assimilation of local values? These questions do not have an

exclusively spiritual or cultural/ethical character. Some of them also have political consequences. There has been a recent intensification of a debate in one part of Europe about equal rights of partners of the same gender to form a quasi-family model of common life, which was launched as a part of a broad anti-discrimination initiative. It has found an echo also in official documents of the EU. This was understood by many as a hidden attack on the cultural and ethical integrity of some candidate countries. Religious and ethical standards in large parts of Europe do not allow compromise in the theme of registered partnership and acceptance of the new forms of the social life, which would oppose a broadly accepted and traditional family model. On the other hand, there are others in the churches who do see these as developments which they can support. The European Union has to recognise and be sensitive to these differences. On the one hand it has to support recognition of the rights of minorities. On the other hand, however, it has to find as well a way of honouring the right of the member states to guard their cultural autonomy of the member countries and to respect their own traditions including religious traditions. The right not to be discriminated against has an undisputed importance. It has however also its limitations. Non-discrimination is not an absolute principle. In the same way as minority can be discriminated by majority, also majority has to be protected against extreme or even violent minorities. A proper balance between anti-discrimination and right for autonomy in certain aspects and within certain limits is more important, then absolutising only one of them. The right of cultural autonomy should be accepted as a general standard in common Europe.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Adopted text of the EU directive on equal treatment in the field of employment and occupation anti-discrimination recognised these specificities. It is an example that it is possible to find a way for accommodating the principle of anti-discrimination with the principle of autonomy.



## **4. Churches in the process of European unification**

### **4.1. What is the role of the churches today**

The history of Europe confirms that the common roots of values, which are accepted throughout the whole continent, are related to the mission of Christianity. On the other hand, it has to be also recognised that Christianity is not a unique value for the European continent today and a model of ‘Christian Europe’ is not appropriate. Equally, churches are recognising that in a course of history they were not only delivering message of Gospel. On various occasions churches contributed to developing tensions, misunderstandings and even conflicts. Not always were churches consistently following basic rights of respecting minorities’ opinions, respecting each other and religious freedom. This did not only happen in the remote past. Also in our current situation tensions still persist which are revealed on various occasions in the ecumenical movement. These are signs that churches in their earthly organisational dimensions are not ‘perfect institutions.’ In spite of that, however, values, which are conveyed by churches in their mission, are stronger than human failures, which cannot be separated from them. History also proved that message of Gospel is stronger than human failures, errors and misunderstandings. Even today churches, with their ecclesial variety, very often fail to deliver clear and unified message to society.

It has to be acknowledged as well that Christian churches are part of broader group of various religious traditions and communities. However, in spite of this reality, the substantial role of Christian churches in society – in debate about values in society, politic culture and science, in

their pastoral and diaconal roles and their ethical contribution – needs to be recognised. Christian churches are not only a part of European history, but also a vital and integral part of the functioning social infrastructure. In spite of the fact that there is not an ecclesial unity, the voice of the Christian churches needs to be taken into consideration. The variety of church and religious traditions in Europe is to be understood not as an obstacle but as an enrichment, which could be of use in the creation of a common European structure. It is completely unsatisfactory to pursue exclusively the pattern of market values to create a common Europe. Accompanying ethical and spiritual dimensions are essential for the success of the project. It is also not enough to administer the whole process from centrally placed even if legitimately elected political institutions. There is a role for the churches and religious communities as guardians, independent of state power, of many European traditions as well as guardians of the specifically ethical dimension of this process. This role is substantial and truly irreplaceable.

Churches are however not only that. Churches played an important role in society on various occasions, which are part of European heritage. Churches played a specific role in the recent history of Europe in those countries, which were under the rule of communist regimes. The significant contribution of churches to the reform process which followed the collapse of the ideological division between East and West is undisputed. These contributions legitimise the role of the churches in their effort to be an active part of the present development in Europe which is a direct continuation of the political process which was promoted at the beginning of 90ies in Central and Eastern European countries. The experience of churches drawn from life both in freedom and totalitarian oppression, in EU member countries and in candidate and non candidate

countries gives them credibility to be effective contributors to the process of European unification.

A very specific contribution to the process of European unification can be offered by the community of churches gathered in the Conference of European Churches (CEC). This is based on the history of CEC and contribution of its member churches to the practical development of links between East and West. For more than 40 years, churches contributed through CEC to development of understanding and solidarity and to overcoming of barriers which existed between both part of Europe until recently. This is a very specific contribution to the practical development of European community and can be used as a practical experience also in dealing with a complex question of European integration which churches are ready to apply.

It is a vital role of the Christian churches to demonstrate their common call to credible witness in society at the current stage of development in Europe. Co-operation of Christian churches in their activities vis-à-vis European institutions is part of their commitment and their responsibility. Their readiness jointly to contribute to it is expressed also in the current draft of the Charta Oecumenica.

#### **4.2. Contribution of churches**

In spite of their imperfections as organisations and methods which reflect a variety of ecclesial, national and cultural differences across Europe, churches have recently contributed intensively to facilitating the resolution of conflicts, breaking down barriers, and seeking mutual understanding. This has been especially true at local and regional levels. Promotion of the culture of peace has been seen in many occasions as a final and ultimate goal of the EU as well as the original inspiration, which has stood since the foundation of the EU. The close relationship of both – European inspiration and the Gospel (“Good News”) of Churches is a value which should be not overlooked.

The churches play an important role in society by fulfilling their pastoral and diaconal tasks. The experience of churches in work with various, sometimes very divergent, sectors of society such as with young, unemployed, disable, sick and migrant people, as well as with all who are excluded from the mainstream society would be a contribution to community building and improving social cohesion. Churches have a special experience of work with Roma communities. In some European countries co-existence between the mainstream and Roma communities creates substantial problems at various levels of society. Churches can contribute by a significant commitment and by offering their experience and their methods in overcoming these difficulties.

There has been already mentioned a serious role which play in the construction of future Europe various sorts of minorities which are living on Europe territory. Minorities are at the same time both an enrichment but also seen by many as a hidden threat and a potential source of serious difficulties to European society. Churches have a rich experience and also methods which can be helpful in overcoming tensions resulting from living together for communities of various backgrounds. In such a way churches can contribute to the complex learning process how to live and manage pluriformity in society. The same experience and involvement of churches can be

used for overcoming of different sorts of problems related with migrants and asylum seekers. Churches have everyday experience of work with the misery of many migrants and all those who are not from any reasons covered by the protection of the social systems. On the base of this knowledge and experience churches are well-suited advocates for integration of human rights issue into the agenda of the process of enlargement of the EU.

Churches are defenders of the traditional values of communal life. Concept of the family as a basic unit of society and as an image of society is to be taken as concept with has its validity for developing links inside broader local communities but also in community of nations. In close relation to it is for churches obvious to promote a culture of solidarity. The true community can be based only on respecting of each other and helping each other. The biblical word about 'bearing one another's burden,' is the base line for the mutual sharing of resources, which is indispensable for true community.

Churches play an important role in sharing and expanding of positive life experience among various types of communities. Churches are present at all levels of society. Especially the grassroots elements of the church's life are of great significance. Churches already now have developed structure, which demonstrates their effort to re-discover their common mission. Based of values inspired by biblical principles, which they represent, churches are able to bring to civil society witness of life in solidarity based on sacrifice, their are able to highlight value of sharing and mutual enriching. Churches and religious communities are those who are able to contribute in effort to 'vitalise' developing European construction and be witnesses of values of substantial

importance.

Churches have its vital role in a developing of a coherent view of sustainability and prosperity in Europe. Including of various aspects, which influence daily life of people including ethical one, is a basic biblical message. Coherent view of sustainability is however also the basic need which needs to addressed by appropriate institutions on the way to build Europe with a good perspective for the future.

From all these reasons churches gathered in the Conference of European Churches very much welcome the fact that the European Commission's Communication Strategy is not only a project with a certain form but develops also its content. It welcomes the fact that the European Commission will do its best to engage various political, economic and cultural groups in dialogue about European integration in order 'to bring about a wide-ranging public debate which is informed by the facts and their implications.'<sup>22</sup> Churches with their extensive infrastructure, present in all European countries and various levels from grassroots to international and with their involvement in the process expect to be among the natural partners in the implementation of the Strategy. Churches expect to be part of an open discussion not only about the practicalities of the process but about values, roots and motivations, which are related to it. Churches as values based communities should play a substantive role in this discussion.

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<sup>22</sup> *European Commission Progress report 2000*, p.7

### **4.3. Church as a value based community**

The churches support an integration of Europe which must not be confined to its political and economic aspects. Without common values, unity cannot endure. This conviction has been expressed at various occasions. In *Charta Oecumenica*, a document jointly prepared by the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Catholic Bishops' Conferences is expressed the commitment of the churches to support the process. At the same time the *Charta Oecumenica* stressed the role of the churches and religious communities in it. Churches as value based communities can give a supporting background to European integration. Whereas the EU as an institution does not always seem to be able to focus on and promote values, the churches have always tried to do so. The Christian church is based on the message of Jesus Christ, which is understood as the Gospel for all people. Christians does not restrict themselves to their inner circles but feel, on the basis of this Gospel, a responsibility for the whole world. Christians are called to fulfil their role at various places in society. One of basic features which is a coherent part of Christian teaching and a Christian way of life is a deep understanding of the meaning of solidarity in society. For creating of a common Europe is a deep understanding of solidarity of crucial importance. Only on the base of solidarity can be build true links and living contacts between different regions, different communities and different parts of the continent. Therefore churches welcome the introduction of the chapter on solidarity into the Charter of Fundamental rights.<sup>23</sup> For a common Europe words such as 'hope' and 'reconciliation' are also parts of the Christian message of crucial importance. No community can be built without a vision of the future. Substantial elements in forming a vision are forgiveness, which enables us to deal with the past, and hope.

The role of religion in society varies in different parts of our continent. Different systems or orders of values exist in different parts of the continent. Churches are one of the elements in this variety. Tension between individual and collective aspects of human rights, something which is experienced in different parts of European history and the impact of this tension on the present reality are just examples of this variety. To manage pluriformity in European society is one of the crucial aspects of the future development on the continent. It is therefore necessary to enter into an open discussion on the theme of what unites and what separates different parts of the continent East and West, North and South. The involvement of the churches in this sort of debate is unavoidable.

Churches have proved on many occasions that their respect for human rights and their involvement in their implementation are an integral part of their tradition. In this, the churches are not following their own interests but they have the whole of society in mind. During 2000, churches actively contributed to the process of drafting of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. In this respect churches are to be seen as an integral, vital and inseparable part of European civil society.

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<sup>23</sup> *Charter of Fundamental Rights*, Chapter 4

## 5. Conclusion

The European unification process has several challenges to face at present. In order to be able to complete the process successfully, there are additional dimensions and accents which need to be considered in the current shape of the process. Churches in Europe are not the only contributors who have to be taken account of at the current stage of the European integration process. They are not addressing all the problems related to the process and their contribution is in no way complete. On the other hand, they are deeply convinced, on the basis of their tradition, values and role in society, that they have much to say to the future vision of Europe. Churches have a message and they have hope. The common Europe cannot be build without them.

At the present stage Europe has a chance to contribute significantly to the building of an area of peace, freedom and good quality of life. This chance however may not be open for ever. The European Commissioner responsible for Enlargement Günter Verheugen was very precise on this point: 'It is an illusion to believe that the EU will keep the enlargement project open for an unlimited period. If anything, a window of opportunity is now open but it will not remain open for ever.' This is true not only with respect to the enlargement but also with respect to the process of European unification. Therefore every opportunity must be seized and all available stakeholders in the process need to find their appropriate place in it. There are many challenges, opportunities and there are questions which are still open. The responsibility is not to miss the chance. Churches are part of an open chance for Europe.

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