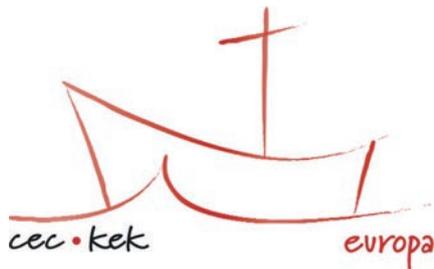


European Parliament Elections 2004

**Briefing Document
for Churches**

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Conference of European Churches
Conférence des Églises Européennes
Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen
Конференция Европейских Церквей



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We link our members to serve for solidarity and justice

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The 6th direct election of members of the European Parliament will take place from 10 to 13 June 2004. This time the enlarged Union of 25 Member States will be participating, 10 of them having just joined the Union. It will be the first chance for citizens from these countries to be part of the process. For all EU citizens, in both old and new Member States, it will be an opportunity to exercise their responsibility and demonstrate commitment to the Union. Their accession to the Union dismantles long-existing division lines in the continent and allows the EU to welcome in its midst 8 countries formerly separated from true cooperation by the political system. Discussions about the future shape of EU policies will take place at a time when the global community as a whole is facing serious concerns. The new Union needs

renewed commitment, rethinking of its management, its role, its substance and its function.

Recent developments in Europe demonstrate the increasing relevance of the dynamic processes inside the EU for the life of all the Union's citizens. Churches and church-related organisations do not stand outside these concerns.

As publishers (see the attached list) we have two objectives. The first is to give churches in EU Member States information and ideas for discussion during the election campaign. The second is to indicate (though not in an exhaustive form) concerns which churches and church-related organizations have presented to the European institutions on various occasions.

The basic role and tasks of the European Parliament

The churches plead for an increase of the democratic content of the European Union, for which the Parliament is one of the best instruments. In its current form, the European Parliament:

- considers the EU Commission's proposals and is associated with the Council in the law-making process, in some cases as co-legislator. Under the co-legislator procedure it can amend laws by an absolute majority of its members and veto decisions of the Council.
- shares budgetary authority with the European Council,

and can therefore influence EU spending. The Parliament must approve the Union's budget.

- exercises democratic supervision over the EU Commission. It approves the nomination of Commissioners, has the right to censure the EU Commission and grants discharge.
- exercises political supervision over all the institutions.
- can play a crucial role in informing and involving people in their country in these processes, through their accountability to the electorates.

The Future

Citizens of the European Union will elect 732 members of Parliament for a term of five years. The draft EU Constitutional Treaty would give the Parliament much more power. The Parliament would oversee all expenditure in the Union and have the last say on all budgetary categories. The

Parliament would also have greater influence because the co-decision procedure would be applied in more areas, covering close to 80% of policy matters. National Parliaments would be more closely linked to the law-making process within the EU.

More information about the European Parliament can be found on: <http://www.europarl.eu.int>. If you want to know how political parties prepare for the election, check on the web sites of the parties in your country or also on the web site of the European Parliament.

Concerns of Churches and Church-related organisations

Churches and specialised church organisations are aware of their responsibility towards developments in Europe. This was reflected most recently in the process of the development of the EU Constitutional Treaty. Enlargement of the EU, substantial reform of some of the EU crucial policy areas (e.g. agricultural policy), as well as the process of integration in Europe in its deeper sense are increasingly in

the focus of attention of the people in the Union. Therefore, churches and church-related organisations look ahead to the elections of the European Parliament and seek to engage themselves in discussions with candidates during the elections. This Briefing Paper is intended to assist all who take an interest in the elections prepare themselves for these discussions.

What Union do we want?

The European Union needs to be a **community of values**. Reconciliation and promotion of the culture of peace can be taken as prominent examples of the role of the values

in the Union's construction. These and other values such as solidarity and dignity of the person have an irreplaceable function in the Union and have been traditional corner

stones of its existence. The role of values in the Union has recently become a point of increasing concern, clearly demonstrated in the lifetime of the outgoing Parliament by the development of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the draft of the EU Constitutional Treaty.

The *raison-d'être* of the EU cannot be limited to its economic dimension. The often-emphasised role of competition in the life of the Union has to be balanced by true solidarity. The enlarged Union needs to demonstrate practical solidarity in its midst, among its Member States, regions and citizens and equally to its partners in Europe and overseas.

The EU needs to express its responsibility for the whole continent and develop adequate links to its immediate

neighbouring countries as well as to further partners in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Care has to be taken to strike a good balance between a growth of attention to the 'near abroad' and a focus on poverty eradication in the so-called developing world.

The EU needs to pay the utmost attention to developing Europe as a multicultural and multiethnic continent - as a meeting space, which is able to recognise its own tradition, and at the same time able to accommodate manifold cultures and ethnic groups living in its territory. The Union needs to take care about real pluriformity in its midst, which needs to be protected as one of the basic features of the European society.

Subsidiarity and closeness to the citizen

Citizens fear that they are faced with a growing centralisation in Europe, too great interference by Brussels in the concerns of Member States or the loss of cultural identity. Whether or not they are justified, these fears must be taken seriously by politicians. Here, the Parliament could show a good example by trying to establish closer links with voters, by critically

examining its information work and - through consultations, for example - giving priority to an intense exchange of views between members and citizens. To win trust of the citizens is the essential condition for the success of the Union and, in particular, for the EU Parliament.

Unemployment and social exclusion

Social policy within the EU is a national competence. Nevertheless, co-ordination and information sharing as well as effective stimulation of social policy play a substantial role at the Union level. One of the greatest challenges for the policy of the Union and individual states is the continuing high level of unemployment, which leads to social exclusion of a growing part of the population. We expect the future Parliament to promote creation of fair job opportunities for everyone as one of its political commitments. Certain groups, which are disadvantaged in the labour market, merit particular attention - e.g. disabled people, women, single parents, migrants and ethnic minorities.

Churches and church-related organisations note with concern the growth of poverty, especially child poverty and that of families with children. Increasing economic globalisation and the progress of new technologies in all sectors of the economy doubtless require flexibility of the world of work. These upheavals must not bear only on the weakest sections of society. Employment policies cannot be defined without being linked with social policies and economic strategies should not be fostered without social conscience.

The vision for Europe is giving quality of life for all. Economic growth is not a guarantee against poverty and social exclusion. Although often described as the key objective for the European Union, it does not automatically lead to higher quality of life.

Everyone must have the right to grow old in dignity. European countries have to guarantee adequate and sustainable pensions for their citizens. More work has to be done in order to develop care systems for the elderly and long term care.

The quality and access to social services for all citizens is a visible expression of solidarity and human dignity for all. The quality of social services must be protected from the pressures of free competition. An overemphasized focus on the tendering principle has led to an unhealthy competition between non-profit making service providers, in which money is the decisive factor in evaluating the quality of services provided.

Human Rights

The European Parliament often concerns itself with human rights questions. Churches and church-related organisations hope that the future Parliament will continue this examination of the human rights inside and outside the Union. As

bodies, which are often working alongside marginalized and voiceless groups in society in Europe and elsewhere, they see an urgent need for this work.

In European society violence against women in its many forms, requires measures at European as well as national levels. Such measures should **combat violence and promote equal rights and opportunities for women.**

Of great concern is the re-emergence of slavery in Europe,

particularly as trafficking in human beings is increasing. Trafficking is linked to inhuman and degrading treatment of persons. Combating this crime needs to ensure effective protection and assistance to trafficked persons.

Migration and Asylum Policies

Until May 2004, decisions concerning asylum and migration policies will be taken unanimously by the Council of Ministers - and up to now the Parliament has had a limited right of involvement in decisions. However, the draft Constitutional Treaty foresees co-decision of the Parliament and Council in these fields. Churches and church-related organisations hope that the Parliament will continue to work on these issues relating particularly to any further erosion of the right to

asylum and the search for a just migration and asylum policy, safeguarding the rights of migrants in Europe and upholding the principles of protection for refugees as stipulated in the Geneva Refugee Convention. A fair migration policy also requires improved cooperation with third countries, rather than bilateral readmission agreements and recruitment campaigns. Balanced migration agreements need to be envisaged.

New Technologies

The rapid advance of new technologies in all sectors of life leads churches and church-related organisations to encourage politicians to weigh up carefully, in each case, both economic interests and the real needs of people. This is particularly necessary where the effects on and possible change to human life caused by methods of research and production cannot be known in advance. In the controversies over the patenting

of biotechnological inventions and labelling of genetically modified foodstuffs, the representatives of the Parliament have shown a great sensitivity for the concerns of numerous citizens. Conscious of the message of the Gospel, which fixes limits on human intervention in God's creation, we hope that future members will take on the role of guardian with the same commitment..

Europe in the world

The European Union is among the world's most important donors of humanitarian and development aid. During the past legislative period, there has been no lack of fine statements on EU development policy. The Draft EU Constitutional Treaty also defines strong principles for external action, recognizing the need for sustainable development and the importance of the eradication of poverty. Yet, there are various issues, which in our opinion should be seriously addressed during the coming five-year legislative period.

Much more than before the **EU needs to emphasize coherence of its own policies.** It should not be acceptable to provide development aid while, at the same time, undermining the position of poor people through trade, agricultural and other policies. It should also be avoided that development and humanitarian aid policies become a mere 'tool' of an EU foreign and security policy which is aimed at protecting only the interests of the Union. We expect the EU institutions **to promote genuine multilateral policies over and against forces based on unilateral approaches.**

With the enlargement, 10 new countries join the EU. Most of these countries have low budgets for, and do not yet have a strong tradition of ,development cooperation and

humanitarian aid. A public debate about these issues is largely lacking, and there is **a need for developing both capacity building and global education programmes.**

Since its inception, the EU has developed special relationships with the group of ACP countries (in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific). With its emphases on human rights, good governance and civil society participation, the Cotonou agreement, which currently governs the relationship between the EU and the ACP countries, has a number of laudable features. More problematic are the plans to establish free trade zones, by the end of 2007, between the EU and regional groupings of ACP countries. Free trade does not automatically lead to poverty reduction and sustainable development. Therefore, the EU institutions have the task (together with the ACP states) **to ensure that the trade negotiations, and indeed all their policies, will be aimed at achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals – notably reducing the number of people living in absolute poverty by 50% by 2015.** Working effectively towards these Goals, and implementing long-term poverty focused development policies present a key challenge for the EU institutions during the next legislative period.